

NEWSLETTER

FOR BIRDWATCHERS

Volume 5-1965 January



NEWSLETTER
FOR
BIRDMATCHERS

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CONTENTS

Birdwatching in Kendal, Ahmednagar District. By Rev. A. Navarro, S.J.	1
Some bird notes from Sukkur, West Pakistan. By D.A. Holmes and J.O. Wright. (<u>Continued</u>)	5
Birdwatchers' Field Club of Roorkee. By Joseph George ..	9
A note on the field trips in Bombay. By V. Udayashankar Rao	10
Obituary Note: Prof. John Burdon Sanderson Haldane	10
Review:	
BIRDS OF THE WORLD. (Amin Tyabji)	10
Notes and Comments	11
Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Birdwatchers' Field Club of India	12
Correspondence:	
Strange behaviour of a crow. By V. Ravi (p. 13); Activities of the Birdwatchers' Club in Kerala. By K.K. Neelakantan (p. 14) 'Curious play' or food-getting. By J.S. Serrao (p. 14)	

BIRDMATCHING IN KENDAL, AHMEDNAGAR DISTRICT

By

Rev. A. Navarro, S.J.

St. Xavier's High School, Bombay

The uninitiated will in all probability look askance at this title. What fun can there be in birdwatching? It depends on what you love. But the man with a streak for the glory of the naturalist's life will find intense joy in this occupation. It is not just watching with a vacant mind the beautiful birds of nature. There is more to it than meets the eye: those rolling mirrors in the head of a man.

Instead of staying at home for the Divali holidays, firing crackers and feasting on sweetmeats, we set out for Kendal in the Ahmednagar District with a group of our school students. Our purpose was to get first-hand experience in birdwatching. This is the upshot of our holiday.

Now Kendal is but a small village, like thousands of other Indian villages, between Ahmednagar and Sangamner. The countryside is largely as flat as the palm of your hand but surrounded by hills at an appreciable distance. Day after day we tramp-

ed across the fields of sugarcane, cotton, jowari and ground-nuts, with trees scattered all over the wide plain. The bullock cart tracts were shaded with a kind of middle-sized tree of the acacia family, with some variety of cactus and patches of tall green grass here and there. The Kendal village is ringed round by the Hulla River that was then still brimful of water but flowing sedately. But we soon found out the spots where we could cross the river at knee-deep. Naturally the Hulla was a rendezvous of attraction for a great variety of waterbirds.

Our first impression of the situation was one of dejection and disappointment. The entire panorama of this countryside seemed devoid of any interest for birdwatching. We felt that we had hit upon the wrong spot for our purpose; some of the party, like the sailors of Columbus, felt like giving it up for lost. But first impressions are not always the best; actually, third, and not second (as the proverb has it!), thoughts are best. We were soon to be rewarded for an extra ounce of courage and patience. We were gladdened beyond words when we discovered that here there was plenty of bird life to be seen. We planned our survey by stages; we even determined to visit certain spots in particular more than once to make sure of the correctness of our findings.

It will better serve our purpose if we mention the birds we observed by their groups as we saw them with a brief description of their environment. It is by far the more pleasant method for the lover of birdwatching; the names of the birds mentioned we have had recourse to as found in Salim Ali's excellent book, THE BOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS.

At the end of six days of hard work, footing it out for miles, we found to our great surprise and joy a list of a hundred varieties of different birds.

Among the fields of this district we came across isolated cottages and villages both large and small. Within the limits of these cottages and villages we saw the usual mixed communities of birds that live within the precincts of human beings like the House Crow, the Jungle Crow, the Common Myna, the Jungle Myna, the House Sparrow, the Common Kite and the Yellowthroated Sparrow. But near the villages, where large trees spread their friendly arms at full length, we found that the Brahminy Myna, the oriol, the Rose-ringed Parakeet, the Maharatta Woodpecker, and the Koel, that were as common as the House Crow, often frequented these shady spots.

However the common Bee-eater, the King Crow, the Hoopoe, the Blue Jay were conspicuous by their small numbers. It was a surprise to us all to see that the most common bird in this locality was the Baybacked Shrike. In fact, it could be seen almost everywhere both in the fields and hard by the villages.

The Tailor-bird, the Small Minivet, the Purplerumped Sunbird, the Grey Tit and the Iora were seen either singly or forming part of small parties of insectivorous birds of a different type of environment.

Then again the Crow-Pheasant and the Tree Pie we observed in but scanty numbers flying from tree to tree or darting out from large bushes. The Crow-Pheasants were more common than the Tree Pies. Only on one occasion did we see the Rosy Pastors among the Buntings and Brahminy Mynas. The Red Munia and the Whitethroated Munia we saw everywhere flying about in pairs, but more often in small parties.

The Magpie Robin, the Indian Robin, the Redstart and the Blue-throat we found confined in spots where there was abundant shade and light undergrowth at no pronounced distance from the villages around. Associated with this group of birds we very often noticed the Tickell's Blue Flycatcher and the Redvented Bulbul. The latter we saw hobnobbing more or less all over these places in company with other birds.

Along the bullock cart ruts and nullahs, alongside which there grew an abundance of green grass with bushes and small trees to break the monotony, we saw seven varieties of warblers. This was a pleasant and refreshing sight. Here we saw the Indian Great Reed Warbler, Blyth's Reed Warblers, the Orphean Warbler, the Booted Tree Warbler, the Ashy Wren Warbler and the Indian Wren Warbler. What a splendid company they made on the wing, bristling with life and the enjoyment of their environment. But of all this glorious company two of them -- Blyth's, and the Booted Tree Warbler -- we were destined to watch more often on trees, while the others preferred to rest on bushes, reeds and grass. Blyth's Warbler which was the most common everywhere, gave us the joy of hearing its rather monotonous chat-chat-chat chant. But what was our surprised delight when we suddenly discovered him warbling at noon trimming his throat to a sweet, melodious and soul-lifting song akin, we thought, to that of the Oriol; only his was a much softer and less high-pitched melody.

Some of the younger members of the party, more conversant with English poetry than myself, began lisping Shelley's lines that came so naturally to their minds:

'Teach me half the gladness
That they brain must know;
Such harmonious madness
From my lips would flow, --
The world should listen then as I am listening now.'

Observations were not yet over. On open patches of ground we now saw the Blackbodied Finch Lark, the Rufoustailed Finch Lark, Sykes's Crested Lark, the Common Pipit and some species of Chats like the Redtailed chat, but we could not decide on its identification. But the Collared Bush Chat and the Pied Bush Chat we saw of tenor in several other places; the Collared Bush Chat being more numerous than the Pied.

And again, small flocks of Rock Pigeons we saw associated with mynas and roseringed parakeets on tall trees near the villages. The Little Brown Dove and the Ring Dove dotted the fields everywhere. The jowari fields were already crowded with noisy Black-headed Buntings, Common Weaver Birds, and Rose Finches. They were obviously enjoying the sheer vitality of joyous living and taking the whole of this Ahmednagar world for their province. In the vicinity of small villages, where Common Sparrow and Yellowthroated Sparrows abounded, we noticed also the presence of Rose Finches in as sportive a mood.

Only on two occasions were we greeted with the sight of the Grey Partridge. As for the Common Quails, they were more often seen on the edges of the sugarcane fields. They seemed very afraid of the human race and apparently at the slightest suspicion of danger they would take cover among the thickly packed clumps of sugarcane. And again, the only swallows that we saw were the Common Swallow and the Crag Martin, gliding for most of the time along the margin of the nullah.

Of the representatives of the Cuckoo family we saw in all only five. Two of these we have already mentioned, the Crow Pheasant and the Koel. The other three were the Pied Crested Cuckoo, the Indian Plaintive Cuckoo and the Common Hawk-Cuckoo -- the last mentioned on more occasions than one.

It was only on the free, open country that the Large Grey Babbler could be seen to advantage; but along the footpaths and bullock cart tracts, among the cactus and thorny bushes, he was also open to view.

As for eagles and hawks we observed that the most common hawk was the Honey Buzzard. We noticed them in several places and in two phases -- the spotted and the brown phase. In the latter phase they looked more like the common kite from a distance. We learned to recognize them by their long tails. We saw the White-eyed Buzzard on a few occasions. But quite by accident the Red-headed Merlin, the Kestrel and the Sparrow-Hawk came our way, and on a few occasions again we observed the Whitebacked Vulture. As for the night birds we could only see the Spotted Owlets. They were abundant everywhere. Occasionally we noticed the presence of Cattle Egrets. About four miles from Kendal there is a large lake, whose name we did not ascertain. But there before our very eyes hovered in sight a small group of Gullbilled Terns and a colony of White Ibis. The Glossy Ibis we noticed on the uncultivated fields strutting about in a fierce search for frogs and insects. There also we saw the Kora or Water Cock, the Pheasant-tailed Jacana, the Openbilled Stork, the Whitebreasted Kingfisher, the Common Kingfisher, the Comb Duck, along with a colony of small cormorants and a large flock of Tufted Pochards, plus another small flight of Middle Egrets, a few Grey Herons and on the banks waxed gaily the wagtails and some sandpipers.

As the Mulla bordered the Kendal village we had plenty of time and many chances to observe the bird life along the banks of this river. Along its more shady and shadowed parts we saw the Whitebreasted Water Hen, the Indian Moorhen and the Pond Herons. Upon the open patches small groups of Blackwinged Stilts, the Redshank and the Greenshank and the Middle Egrets. We were intrigued to see that these birds maintain a certain tendency to form groups. As for the Kentish Plover, the Ringed Plover, the Common Sandpiper and the Redwattled Lapwing, we found them more often spread out at the sides of the river banks in search of food. Isolated specimens of Brahminy Ducks and both large and small cormorants were more persistent in the deepest part of the river where there was plenty of fish.

Let me admit that on the first and second days of our stay at Kendal we saw only a few wagtails along the river's banks, but as we persevered in our quest we noticed more and more of these wagtails. It soon dawned upon us that they were more numerous than we had at first believed; they were everywhere to be seen. We observed, however, only two varieties of them -- the Indian White Wagtail and the Masked Wagtail.

That brings me to the end of our list of finds during our excursion to the Kendal village in Ahmadnagar District which I had not visited all these years of my stay in India. It was a refreshing and instructive vacation. But I hope it will not be the last time that we visit this interesting little spot of Maharashtra State.

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SOME BIRD NOTES FROM SUKKUR, WEST PAKISTAN

By

D.A. Holmes and J.O. Wright

(Continued from Vol. 4(12):67

516. Blue Rock Pigeon : Columba livia

This ubiquitous bird was found breeding as early as the beginning of February but most birds bred during April.

534. Collared Turtle Dove : Streptopelia decaocto

Breeding of this commonest dove was recorded in May.

541. Little Brown Dove : Streptopelia senegalensis

Nesting was noticed first on June 5 (fully fledged young) and continued into August, several broods apparently being raised.

545. Alexandrine Parakeet : Psittacula eupatria

As this parakeet has apparently never been recorded over most of Sind it is interesting to note that a party of some 50 birds appeared near Sukkur on July 17, along a tree-lined canal. They were still present at the beginning of August. They were wild and unapproachable and seemed most unlikely to be escaped captive birds.

570. Pied Crested Cuckoo : Clamator jacobinus

This delightful bird with its unmistakable ringing call of piu-klit is a summer visitor which arrived on June 7 (the same date recorded for its arrival in lower Sind in 1963). In this area it seems particularly partial to the riverain forests and marshes of the Indus, even when these become flooded in July.

590. Koel : Eudynamis scolopacea

Only a few decades ago this bird was very rare in Sind. Now however it is a common visitor to Lower Sind from April to November. Its spread to the Sukkur region has not yet been so successful. It did not arrive here till May 21, and remained scarce.

747. Bluechecked Bec-eater : Merops superciliosus

While some birds seemed to be associated with desert areas, others were common in damp localities along the Indus, where a bird believed to be an immature was seen on May 26. The preference for water suggests that these birds may have been Bluetailed Bec-eaters (Merops philippinus) for which Sind is not included in the range. Most of these birds left in early July and this theory has not yet been confirmed. Some birds are still present in desert areas.

763. Hoopoe : Upupa epops

The hoopoe is a winter visitor leaving about mid April. The first autumn arrival was noted on July 20. Although from its distribution the common bird here is presumably the typical subspecies (U. e. epops) few birds seen in this area during the winter have had any visible white on the crest.

916. Swallow : Hirundo rustica

A few swallows are occasionally met with in the hot weather and one was seen on June 25, several on July 9 and 31, while they were present in some numbers on Aug. 5. (In Lower Sind, S. of Hyderabad, large numbers were seen on June 22, 1963.)

921. Wiretailed Swallow : Hirundo smithii

Scarce in the area during winter, it arrives in early March and immediately commences nesting under canal bridges, probably raising several broods.

933. Grey Shrike : Lanius excubitor

A family party of two adults and four flying young was seen on July 14.

962. King-Crow : Dicrurus adsimilis

One was seen on a newly completed nest on a side branch of an acacia on May 31.

996. Rosy Pastor : Sturnus roseus

This beautiful starling passes through Sind each year in spring and autumn in astronomical abundance. It seems to travel in waves, reaching Lower Sind in late February and Upper Sind in early April, leaving both areas early in May. On return they were already abundant north of Sukkur by June 24 (having reappeared on about June 17). Maximum numbers were seen in the first half of July and gradually passing south, although they are still present in some numbers at the time of writing (Aug. 16). The first birds did not reach a point about 30 miles south of Sukkur till July 3rd. During the July passage they feed largely among the date palms south of Sukkur where the fruit is just ripening, flighting at dawn and dusk to their roosts in the riverain forest north of Sukkur. At the roosts the trees (Tamarisc and Acacia) over a wide area are coated with black and pink birds while whole trees seem to erupt as a flock takes off for its pre-roosting aerobatics. Although described as a winter visitor it is absent from this area for the midwinter months, and only away during the summer for about 6 weeks.

1000. Starling : Sturnus vulgaris (minor ?)

This very local species of starling is quite a common resident in the riverain forests and overgrown swamps of the area.

1006. Common Myna : Acridotheres tristis

Appears to breed during July.

1008. Bank Myna : Acridotheres ginginianus

Rarely recorded before it started breeding in mid-March when this bird became ubiquitous, honeycombing every available earth cliff (canal banks etc.). Flocks associated with the Rosy Pastors were noted in early July.

1048. House Crow : Corvus splendens

Throughout the area birds appeared to renovate nests and protect territories in February. Activity then died down and

nest building was not observed again till June 10 when it appeared to start simultaneously through the area. A bird is still sitting on a nest commenced on June 10 and does not appear to have raised an intermediate brood.

1059. Raven : Corvus corax

Although pairs of birds are resident in the limestone hills in the area (and are occasionally seen on the edge of Sukkur town), no evidence of nesting period has yet been obtained. Birds seen near the town appear to be larger than those seen in the hills and could be a different subspecies. None seen showed any sign of a brown head.

1123. Whitechecked Bulbul : Pycnonotus leucogenys

A nest with three fully fledged young was found on July 18. The birds left the nest within three days.

1127. Redvented Bulbul : Pycnonotus cafer

The central Punjab and eastern Sind are included in the range of this species. In 1963 they were found to be common in the latter locality, on the margins of the plains, of east of Hyderabad. However one pair was seen in Sukkur on May 21 and again in the same garden on August 5. We have no evidence of breeding but they caused considerable annoyance to the resident pair of Whitechecked Bulbuls. This may be the first record for Upper Sind.

1488. Cetti's Warbler : Cettia cetti

This warbler seems to be a fairly common winter visitor to the dense reedbeds, identified by its very rounded tail and rather rufous plumage. It departed early in March.

1495. Moustached Sedge Warbler : Luscinola melanopogon

This is a very common winter visitor to reedbeds identified by its heavily streaked back and strong supercilium. It was in full song on 1 March before departing.

1524. Yellow bellied Longtail Warbler : Prinia flaviventris

This little wren warbler with its grey crown and bright yellow belly is of local distribution on the sub-continent but is abundant in suitable reedbeds in this area. Once heard, its call of twoedle-li-li is quite unmistakable and in large areas of reedbeds can be heard continuously in all directions, although the bird is rarely seen. It is more readily visible when it occurs in smaller patches of reeds and long grass along canals, when it may be watched for long periods as it perches on tall reeds incessantly calling, sometimes jerking from its legs with the snapping noise characteristic of the wren warblers, which appears to come from the tail.

1531. Longtailed Grass Warbler : Prinia burnesii

This warbler looks more like a small babbler than a warbler. It is quite common in dense grass and tamarisk jungle in swamps or along canals. Its song is a clear sweet liquid warble like the English Hedge Sparrow, lasting about 4 seconds, and was heard on March 1.

1535. Tailor Bird : Orthotomus suterius

A family party was seen on 23 May.

1550. Indian Great Reed Warbler : Acrocephalus stentoreus

This does not seem to be resident but leaves in March, although a party of 12 on passage was seen in a fodder crop at the edge of a desert area on 8 April, and the first autumn record was on 13 July.

1556. Blyth's Reed Warbler : Acrocephalus dimidiatus

One bird on passage was present in a garden in Sukkur : from 27 April (perhaps earlier) till 14 May.

1563. Booted Warbler : Hippolais caligata

This warbler was quite common in marshy areas and in the tamarisk and riverain forests of the Indus during March, April and May and was possibly breeding. None was seen in June but loose parties were seen in the first half of July.

1567-1571. Lesser Whitethroat sp. : Sylvia sp.

These warblers are difficult to identify in the field but are common winter visitors up to about the end of April. They occur both in gardens (S. curruca ?) and in desert scrub (S. minula ?).

1644-1646. Bluethroat : Erithacus svecicus

A common winter visitor to damp localities. On 1 March before their departure, they were in breeding plumage with varying amounts of red on the breast.

1671. Black Redstart : Phoenicurus ochrurus

A common winter visitor, last seen 27 March (returns at the end of September).

1695. Stone Chat : Saxicola torquata

A winter visitor to damp localities, last seen 16 February.

1699. Whitetailed Stone Chat : Saxicola leucura

This rather dingy coloured resident was identified on June 26.

1700. Pied Bush Chat : Saxicola caprata

This is one of the most abundant birds of the area. On 25 May a nest with two freshly hatched young was found in a hole in a bank. Family parties of well-grown young were around at the end of May and abundant a month later.

1707. Redtailed Wheatear : Oenanthe xanthopygia

A not uncommon visitor from October to 8 February, in flocks.

1709. Desert Wheatear : Oenanthe deserti

A winter visitor to barren areas leaving in the second week of April.

1712. Pied Chat : Oenanthe picata

A common winter visitor leaving about the end of March. The first arrival was noted on 5 August.

1858. Paddyfield Pipit : Anthus novaeseelandiae

A common breeding bird especially in the grassy, non-saline riverain areas. A nest was found in a clearing on 25 May -- a cup on the ground with three rather oval eggs, greenish stone in colour, with heavy dark brown blotchings.

1875-1880. Yellow Wagtail : Motacilla flava

A common winter visitor and passage migrant. Spring passage through this area lasts from about mid-March to mid-April.

The beautiful Blackheaded form (M. f. melanogrisca) is the most prevalent but both the Greyheaded (M. f. thunbergi) and Sykes's (M. f. beema) have been identified. On Blackheaded Wagtail was seen on 26 June.

1916. Purple Sunbird : Nectarinia asiatica

This is a summer visitor only in this area arriving in early March (March 4) and soon becoming common. Nesting was recorded from 16 May till July, nests often being suspended from creepers against a house and usually in the shade. In at least one case two broods were raised in the same nest.

1945. Sind Jungle Sparrow : Passer pyrrhonotus

Common in the riverain area at Sukkur both in tamarisk scrub and acacia forest.

1957. Baya : Ploceus philippinus

1962. Streaked Weaver Bird : Ploceus manyar

Both these weavers attain breeding plumage about the second week of April and commence building in May. Nesting activity may continue till October.

/To be continued/

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BIRDWATCHERS' FIELD CLUB OF ROORKEE

By

Joseph George

Central Building Research Inst., Roorkee, U.P.

A Birdwatchers' Field Club has been formed at Roorkee with Prof Dinesh Mohan as President.

The object of the Club is to create an active interest in birds and birdwatching among the residents of Roorkee, especially the large student population.

The Club organized its first birdwatching trip on 1 November 1964. The response from members was very encouraging.

* * * * *

A NOTE ON THE FIELD TRIPS IN BOMBAY

By

V. Udayashankar Rao

A field trip is organized for bird enthusiasts once a month. The usual venue is the scenic 'Lake District' of North Bombay comprising of the wooded area around Vihar and Tulsi lakes.

The response to these field trips is quite heartening and it is hoped that it would improve further. Novices and experts alike partake in these trips; the former quickly learn to identify the different species through the guidance of the latter. Hardly any bird escapes the notice of a score or more of prying eyes and the birdwatchers' "bag" is usually quite big. In the December trip 45 species of birds were recorded. The birdwatchers have their share of rarities too. In October they came across a Kashmir Roller*. Dr. Salim Ali remarked that perhaps it was the first record of this bird for Bombay.

The purpose of these field trips is to lure more people into the fold of birdwatchers and to provide the necessary incentive to launch a potential birdwatcher into an actual one.

Also a flock of Spotted Redshank seen in October at Tulsi Lake is the first record of this bird for the Bombay and Salsette Island. - Ed./

OBITUARY

Professor John Burdon Sanderson Haldane

As the December 1964 issue of the Newsletter was being mailed the newspapers of 2nd December carried the sad news of the passing away of Prof. J.B.S. Haldane on 1st December at 11.36 a.m. at the age of 72. He was born in England on 5th November 1892, and in 1957 made India his permanent home and worked at the Genetics and Biometry Laboratory, Government of Orissa, Bhubaneswar.

A detailed account here of his life and important contributions to science would mean a repetition of what various papers and periodicals have already reported on. Readers may be interested to learn that among his many distinctions and accomplishments Prof. Haldane was a keen and painstaking birdwatcher. The Newsletter was privileged to get the benefit of his sound advice and encouragement on many occasions and in many ways. The article he contributed to the Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society in 1959 on 'Non-violent Scientific Study of Birds' (Vol. 56:375-86) is one which should be read and studied by all birdwatchers. It brings out clearly the scientific potentialities of purposeful and methodical birdwatching which is what the Newsletter aims to propagate especially among the younger generation.

REVIEW

BIRDS OF THE WORLD. By Oliver L. Austin Jr., illustrated by Arthur Singer. New York, Golden Press.

This book is a survey of the 27 orders and the 155 families of the world's birds, explaining their origin and evolution, distribution, life histories, behaviour, relationships to one another, and their environment.

: 11 :

The classification is binomial, based on that of Alexander Wetmore. However, scientific names are used sparingly, though they cannot be completely avoided, since many uncommon species have no common name, such as hypocolius and acridas. On the other hand, a number of scientific names have been adopted in common parlance: examples are trogon, junco, vireo, etc.

The book is a truly cooperative venture involving the artist, editor and the publishers' staff. It has a large format (13 x 10 inches) and very beautiful colour prints of the birds, generally in their natural environment. The book comprises 316 pages of text, a comprehensive index, as well as a bibliography of a hundred and seventy five works arranged according to regions, taxonomy and distribution, biology, habits and behaviour, monographs of species, groups and special subjects, field guides and birdwatching. There are also maps showing the distribution in space, and a chart indicating distribution in time, of 'relative numbers of species in the main groups of birds during past ages as shown by the fossil record'.

In short, this book of 'Birds of the World' should be seen by every keen birdwatcher, and find a place in the library of every ornithological society.

Amin Tyabji

NOTES AND COMMENTS

Prof. Dr. W. Rydzewski, the indefatigable editor of The Ring, has now started an International Ornithological Information Service. Will readers please help by sending information on the following subjects. The Editor will pass it on to Prof. Rydzewski.

1. Organizations: all, large and small, even local societies, clubs etc. This refers to the general ornithological, avicultural, pigeon, waterfowl, and game birds organizations.
2. Magazines: all, printed or mimeographed periodicals, newsletters, bulletins, published either by organizations mentioned above, by commercial publishers, or else.
3. Laboratories, Bird Observatories, Field Stations, etc.
4. Museums and private collections of birds
5. Zoos and live bird collections
6. National Parks and Bird Reserves, Sanctuaries
7. Ornithological courses offered by universities and colleges.
8. Legal actions of protective or other character
9. Expeditions planned and conducted
10. Anniversaries
11. Personal news/awards, honours, etc. referring to outstanding ornithologists
12. Obituaries of outstanding ornithologists
13. Grants offered
14. New birds described - reprints of papers are requested.

He writes: 'We would be very glad indeed if you could help us in getting review copies of newly published books, gramophone records, transparencies, film strips, etc. to be reviewed in The Ring and listed in the I.O.I.S.'

: 12 :

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE
BIRDBATCHERS' FIELD CLUB OF INDIA HELD ON
20 DECEMBER 1964 AT THE RESIDENCE OF ZAFAR
FUTEHALLY, JUHU LANE, ANDHERI, BOMBAY 58-AS.

The following were present:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Mr. B.A. Palkhiwala | 11. Mr. Zafar Futehally |
| 2. Dr. Amin Tyabji | 12. Mrs. L. Futehally |
| 3. Mr. G.S. Ranganathan | 13. Mr. Murad Futehally |
| 4. Mrs. G.S. Ranganathan | 14. Mr. R.D. Shroff |
| 5. Mr. V.C. Ambedkar | 15. Mrs. R.D. Shroff |
| 6. Capt. P.B. Bhandarkar | 16. Mrs. S. Nilsson |
| 7. Mr. V. Udaya Shankar Rao | 17. Dr. Gopal Dut Sharma |
| 8. Mr. N. Nilakanta | 18. Mr. S. Verma |
| 9. Mrs. L. Nilakanta | 19. Mr. Jose |
| 10. Miss S. Nilakanta | 20. Mr. J.S. Serrao |

Proceedings:

(Agenda item 1): Mr. S.V. Nilakanta was elected Chairman of the meeting and he asked Mr. Zafar Futehally, the Honorary Secretary, to give a report about the progress of the Club during the past year.

The Hon. Secretary said that the Newsletter for Birdwatchers on which the main effort of the Club was directed, had made reasonable progress since was started in 1960. But the number of people who sent in articles was still very limited and he requested members to send in notes about their outings, as such notes were always greatly appreciated by other readers. There were many arm chair birdwatchers who got considerable vicarious pleasure from their reading. He also appealed for extracts from articles, and back ~~xxx~~ reviews, which would help the Editor to produce each monthly issue. Occasionally frantic telegrams had to be sent for material in the last week of the month. It was for members to ensure that such telegraphic charges be kept to the minimum.

Among the regional centres, the one at Rajkot was fairly active, and the Bombay group had regular field outings which were helping to create an interest in a wider circle (separate report). A Club has also been formed at Roorkee.

(Agenda item 2): The Chairman asked the Hon. Treasurer to report on the finances of the Club. The Hon. Treasurer, Mrs. L. Nilakanta, requested the Hon. Secretary to give the facts. The Hon. Secretary reported that the Newsletter was being sent out to about 425 persons. The total number of subscribers were 215. During 1965 the number of complimentary copies would be cut down. The financial position was as follows:

Expenditure on Newsletter for
Jan.-Dec. 1964:

Envelopes	Rs 345.00	
Newsletter covers	560.00	
Printing ink	132.00	
Duplicating paper	540.00	
Postage	493.00	
Stencil paper (boxes)	88.00	
Casual labour	120.00	
		Rs 2278.00
Receipts from 215 subscribers		1075.00
Deficit		1203.00

The Hon. Secretary agreed to meet the deficit for the current

year. He requested the members to exert themselves to make more members; otherwise the membership fee may have to be raised. Members suggested that more publicity be given to the Newsletter and the Hon. Secretary promised to take some steps in the not too distant future.

(Agenda item 3): The Hon. Secretary said that at his instance, Mr. Stewart Melliush had kindly sent a telegram which he read out: 'Best wishes for successful meeting stop cannot urge too strongly you reelection stop crass and criminal for club not to harness your imagination intelligence and energy stop any change of officers disastrous : Stewart'. He hoped that this would not unduly influence the meeting in the decision about the choice for the coming year.

It was proposed that Mr. S.V. Nilakanta be coopted on the Editorial Board. Mr. Nilakanta, however, declined to accept on the ground that the Bombay region was already well represented and that if the Editorial Board had to be enlarged members from some other regions should be taken. It was suggested that Mr. Stewart Melliush be asked if he was prepared to act as a regional editor from Madras. The rest of the Editorial Board would remain unchanged.

The Hon. Secretary thanked Mr. S.V. Nilakanta and Miss S. Nilakanta for the lively sketches which adorned the Newsletter and Mr. J.S. Serrao for his assistance in the production of the Newsletter.

The meeting terminated with a vote of thanks to the Chair.

CORRESPONDENCE

Strange behaviour of a Crow

I have read with interest Mr. A. David's note in the Newsletter for September 1964. It would, however, appear that the habit of hiding things, especially objects which are brightly coloured or have some kind of appeal, is not unusual with crows. In fact it seems that this is quite a common characteristic -- common to many members of the crow family. We have on a number of occasions observed two species of crows which are found here (Corvus splendens and C. macrorhynchos) picking up many kinds of objects (obviously of no particular utility to them) and securely stowing them away in odd corners or small holes. This is quite apart from their custom of invariably concealing a portion of their food under tiles or similar secret places. The following extract from a feature article of Mrs. Frances Pitt (in the series 'Personalities in Fur and Feathers') which appeared in John O'London's Weekly of May 30, 1936 may be of interest to Mr. David and other readers of your Newsletter:

'A passion for hoarding

'The hoodies (hooded crows) proved amusing pets, full of guile and mischievous pranks, ready to tease one another or any other creature, and to loot all they could. Like the rest of their clan, they had the collector's instinct. They coveted pretty things, from a bright flower to a noticeable pebble, a bit of tin or a piece of broken china. Such "valuables" were hidden with utmost care, being poked into some hole or corner and then covered up.

'This passion for hoarding is common to many members of the Corvidae, from the raven to the magpie, including the jackdaw, as has long been celebrated in that poem which tells us how the jackdaw hopped off with the Cardinal's ring.'

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D. Bavi

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Activities of the Birdwatchers' Club in Kerala

I have little to report regarding the 'activities' in this region. Whenever members or non-members consulted me on matters relating to birds, I gave them prompt replies. But there were very few instances of that sort this year! I am afraid that neither the Regional Editors/Secretaries nor the members know the bounds of one region, or desire to have much contact with others. Apart from Mrs. Wilkinson and Mr. Nanu Nair no one wrote to me this year. I am afraid that there has to be greater precision in defining jurisdictions, and a co-ordinated attempt on the part of ALL office-bearers to bring the members of each region closer together. As things stand now, the Club is functioning only in Bombay -- and members belonging to other areas are just receiving copies of the Newsletter.

I have encouraged the Forest School, Valayar, to put up nest boxes. I am trying to get the Sainik School, Trivandrum to start a birdwatching club if possible.

As my official work has increased enormously I am not able to do much birdwatching. That is why I have not been sending you any notes of late. I hope this Christmas I will be able to spend a few hours with birds!

Prof. K.K. Neelakantan
Trivandrum, Kerala

/Must plead guilty to having been rather slack in 1964.
Hope to do better this year. - Ed./

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'Curious Play'. or Food-getting?

Mr. P.G. Nayak of Nayak Ayurveda Ashram, Katapadi, South Kanara (Mysore State), a keen bird enthusiast whom I recently recruited to the Birdwatchers' Club of India, in a personal communication narrates to me a 'curious play' he witnessed between two otters and some Brownheaded Gulls at about 4 p.m. on 3rd December in the river which flows through his lands. He writes: 'Two otters were submerging and surfacing and the gulls located their movement and started diving close to the water level or wheeling round close to the water where the otters must have been visible to them. I do not know whether these otters were playing hide and seek or the gulls were just teasing the former. It may be even that these otters were rather blood thirsty. I enjoyed this incident for about 20 minutes till the otters were out of sight.'

Apparently in the penultimate sentence quoted above Mr. P. G. Nayak implies that the otters were out to prey on the gulls. To me it appears that the otters were foraging for fish at the time, and the gulls busy diving for the fish so disturbed by the otters.

I feel reproduction of this incident in the Newsletter would induce readers to communicate to the editor such or similar incidents they have come across in their birdwatching experience.

J. S. Serrao
Bombay

Zafar Futchally
Editor, Newsletter for Birdwatchers
32A, Juhu Lane, Andheri, Bombay 58

NEWSLETTER

FOR BIRDWATCHERS

Volume 5-1965 February



NEWSLETTER

FOR

BIRDWATCHERS:

Vol. 5, No. 2.

February 1965

CONTENTS

A brief visit to India. by Dr. N.W. Cusa.	..	..	1
More bird notes from Thekkady in Kerala. By Dr. (Miss) A.M. Mani.			3
Roost of White Wagtails in Bhubaneswar. by S.D. Jayakar and Hari Pulugurtha.	..	..	5
Strange feeding habit of the Little Green Bittern. By V. Uday Shankar Rao (with a sketch).	..	..	6
Some bird notes from Sukkur, West Pakistan. Addendum. By D.A. Holmes (Concluded).	..	..	7
Review:			
THE BOOK OF BIRD LIFE (L.F.)	..	..	9
Notes and Comments	..	..	10

Correspondence:

'Birds and Snakes'. By S.K. Reeves (p. 10); The predilection of the Indian House Crow for bright objects. By S.K. Reeves (p. 11)

A BRIEF VISIT TO INDIA

(Extracts from letters to friends in India)

Dr. N.W. Cusa.

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During my trip to India, I managed to see about 200 species of which about 125 were completely new to me. My excursions in search of birds were mainly about Delhi, where I spent most of my time. Staying in the Hauz Khas enclave, I was able to take an early morning walk in the dusty plains to the South, in the Siri, Mahrauli, Hauz Khas area. The weedy wastelands of this region, awaiting building projects and no longer farmed were very fruitful.

King doves and little brown doves and great grey shrikes were common on the wires; hoopoes and nattering flocks of grey babblers were everywhere; pied wheatears, Strickland's wheatear, pied bush chats and brown rock-chats were sorted out from the Indian robins; larks, finch-larks and pipits remained puzzling; and birds of prey were almost as difficult. Further afield, in the jungly, rocky country between Mahrauli and Palam there were fewer individuals but some additional species - a pale (or pallid) harrier, a black-winged kite, two blossom headed parakeets and an aggressive (nesting?) pair of horned owls in the moat at Mahrauli.

I was introduced by Peter Jackson to the Okhla region and in two trips, one with him, saw the coucal, purple moorhens, river terns, spur-winged plovers and hosts of waders, for the most part European species but including white-tailed lapwings. Of the European waders it was particularly

pleasing to become familiar with what little greenshank the marsh sandpipers, so rare in England but apparently very common in India. Apart from the pleasure of meeting exotic birds it was one of the interesting features of India to meet commonly many of the rare birds of Europe such as the golden oriole, hoopoe, red-rumped swallow, tawny eagle, spotted eagle, great grey shrike, Temminck's stint and white-eyed pochard.

The trip to the Ghana at Bharatpur was quite splendid. Owing to car trouble we did not have as much time there as we intended. It is astonishing to European eyes to see breeding herons, storks and cranes alongside wintering flocks of ducks and geese and with attendant raptors in great numbers. I had a 135 mm lens and took some photographs but only the painted storks were really approachable. The birds of prey were puzzling. I suppose a large mid-brown eagle with pale rump and pale edging to coverts and to secondaries giving two pale wing bars in flight was a steppe eagle? But I note that Peterson says it is indistinguishable from the tawny eagle and may be conspecific. Not so Hutson! Slimmer eagles with spots were spotted eagles, not doubt. They were a darker brown than the supposed steppe eagle. On Peterson's recipe they should have been clanga and not pnaarina but they seemed small. I saw an osprey but missed what I believe is common at Bharatpur, the fishing eagle (Pallas's).

There were some Siberian cranes, already arrived although not expected by the Warden. Unfortunately, although there were great number of greylags, no bar-headed geese seemed to have arrived. Siberian Cranes are very beautiful birds. I also liked the black-necked stork. Openbills are rather ugly, and dingily coloured - rather like a grubby white stork with a deformed bill. Ducks were very plentiful at the Ghana-Nukta, cotton teal, white-eyed pochard and spotbill were new, the rest were common European species including pintail, shoveler, teal, garganey, gadwall, pochard and mallard. There were a few Brahminy ducks.

I had been introduced to the jungle birds of the Bombay area by Salim Ali and Zafar Futehally in the wilder parts of Salsette island and it was interesting that many of these were to be found about Delhi and indeed about Calcutta, notwithstanding the great distances that separate these cities. However, I saw no iora, copper-smith or racket-tailed drongo after I left Bombay.

It was interesting to note changes among the babblers as one moved about India, although some of these are no doubt false impressions based on too brief a stay. Thus the babblers around Bombay seemed to be all jungle babblers, as again they were about Calcutta. But around Hauz Khas only the large grey babbler was found; yet at Okhla the common babbler was the common babbler (if you see what I mean!). However, I think one would have expected greater changes in the bird species on moving 800 miles or so than one sees between Bombay, Delhi and Calcutta.

From Calcutta I had a brief excursion to Darjeeling and here indeed the change was striking as one left the plain for the foothills - far fewer individual birds (or less conspicuous ones?) and quite different species. Identification was a problem too, but since I came home principally with the aid of Salim Ali's "Birds of Sikkim" and based on my field notes, I have identified most, including the red-backed shrike-babbler, the Sikkim tree creeper, the black-headed sibia, the chestnut-bellied rockthrush and (hardest of all) the rufous-vented yuhira. I was also delighted to see a wall-creeper; alas only a glimpse. This bird has been eluding me in the mountains of Europe for 30 years!

In Calcutta I went to see the great gathering of tree-duder in the Alipore Garden - truly a remarkable sight. I made no contacts with birdmen in that city and had no outings. The Sunderbans ought to be a splendid area - deltas invariably are. However, perhaps another time. Some questions - the ring dove is variously called

S. decacoto and rinoria. Is it the same as the collared dove of Europe, or not - or are these two species or just one? How is it that the black redstarts(ochrures) about Delhi look so much more like common redstarts? Which are they? Is there any good means of distinguishing the several species of wren-warbler?

* * * * *

While in India I had a number of identification problems. I have written to Salim about some of them. Pipits, larks and finch-larks were tiresome about Delhi and Wren-Warblers almost as bad. Birds of prey became easier and some were quite definite and distinct but there always seemed to be one or two raptors that one could not give a name to. You badly need a PETERSON'S FIELD GUIDE IN INDIA - but perhaps you have too many species for that kind of treatment?

I suppose India must be one of the richest areas for bird-life although I gather that S. America is richer - Brazil and more especially, Columbia must go to S. America! Certainly unless I visit a new continent I shall never see 125 new species in 4 weeks again - at least I think not.

* * * * *

More Bird Notes from Thekkady in Kerala

By

Dr. (Miss) A.M. Mani,
Meteorological Office, Poona.

I was interested to see Mrs. Ganguli's note on "Birds at Thekkady" in the October issue of the Newsletter and earlier, Mr. Neelakantan's article on "Birds seen in the Periyar Wild Life Sanctuary". Having spent most of my summer holidays in an arund Thekkady since I was a child, I should have learnt more than I did about the birds of the Cardamom and Peermade Hills and of the Periyar lake area. But it was only very recently that a new dimension was added and I became aware of the infinite variety and beauty of the bird life which abounds in Kerala.

During March 1963, I had an opportunity to travel along the west coast from Trivandrum to Mangalore and then back across the Western Ghats through Mercara, Mysore, Ooty, Coimbatore, Purnar and Devikulam to Thekkady, where I spent ten days at my father's cardamom plantation 10 miles north of Thekkady. The last part comprises some of the areas visited by Dr. Salim Ali during the preparation of his classic BIRDS OF TRAVANCORE & COCHIN and is noted for its beauty and charm.

I also spent a day at the Wild Life Sanctuary at Periyar Lake. But as Mr. Neelakantan and Mrs. Ganguli point out, the lake itself is strangely devoid of bird life except for a few Kingfishers, darters etc. But if the forests around Aranya Nivas are rich in bird life, the extensive virgin forests north of Thekkady abound in birds and are second to none in the beauty, variety and abundance of its bird life.

Cardamom plants are grown in forests, with only the undergrowth cleaned and the forests themselves therefore, exist in their original grandeur and provide an unmatched sanctuary for birds. The early morning symphony as Mrs. Ganguli remarks is of a rare, wondrous quality and one is entranced by its sheer beauty and sweetness. Although early morning is naturally the best time for bird watching, I found that anytime is bird watching time in the cardamom sholas. There may not be any birds when one goes into the forest, but if one waits patiently, the whole forest suddenly comes alive and hundreds of birds pass by, whistling, chirruping, singing and foraging for food.

The only restriction of my bird watching was caused by three wild elephants, which chose to spend their time in the plantation while I was there. Once when I had gone out early morning bird watching they completely cut off my retreat for two hours. Incidentally I saw more wild elephants and of course more birds in our plantation than in the wild life sanctuary at Periyar. I list 85 birds I saw at Elavanam and Periyar during the period 23.3.63 - 1.4.63. There are still many unidentified birds, which I hope to see again and also the thrushes, babblers, warblers and fly catchers of which I saw so little.

Birds at Elavanam / Periyar Lake:

1. Indian Jungle Crow.
2. Southern Tree Pie.
3. Indian Grey Tit.
4. Travancore yellow-checked tit.
5. Velvet fronted nuthatch.
6. Malabar Jungle Babbler.
7. Rufous Babbler.
8. Travancore Scimitar Babbler.
9. Nilgiri Quaker Babbler.
10. Bourdillon's black headed Babbler.
11. Gold-fronted chloropsis.
12. Jerdon's chloropsis.
13. South Indian Black Bulbul.
14. Yellow browed Bulbul.
15. Southern red whiskered Bulbul (also at Ooty).
16. Nilgiri Pied bushchat (at Ooty).
17. Black capped black bird.
18. Bourdillon's black bird.
19. White throated ground thrush.
20. Malabar whistling thrush.
21. Nilgiri Verditer Fly catcher.
22. Greyheaded Fly catcher.
23. Paradise Fly catcher.
24. Brown shrike.
25. Malabar wood shrike.
26. Indian common woodshrike.
27. Orange Minivet.
28. Malabar small minivet.
29. Blackheaded cuckoo-shrike.
30. Large Indian cuckoo-shrike.
31. Ashy swallow-shrike.
32. Indian Grey drongo.
33. Malabar large racket-tailed drongo.
34. Tailor bird.
35. Ashy wren-warbler.
36. Greenish willow-warbler.
37. Fairy Blue bird.
38. Indian Oriole.
39. Black headed Oriole.
40. Southern cuckoo.
41. Blyth's Myna.
42. Southern jungle myna.
43. Large pied wagtail.
44. Eastern grey wagtail (Munnar-Kumiti Road).
45. Forest Wagtail.
46. Yunnan Tree Pipit.
47. Nilgiri Pipit.
48. Malay Pipit?
49. Small Nilgiri sky lark.
50. Nilgiri white eye.
51. Purple rumped sunbird.
52. Vigor's yellow-backed sunbird?
53. Small sunbird.
54. Nilgiri Flower pecker.
55. Tickell's Flower pecker?

56. Thickbilled Flower pecker.
57. Southern rufous wood pecker.
58. Malabar golden backed wood pecker.
59. Malabar golden backed throated wood pecker.
60. Malabar's golden backed wood pecker.
61. Malabar Great Black Wood pecker.
62. Large Green barbet.
63. Malabar Crimson throated barbet.
64. Southern crow pheasant.
65. Blue winged Parakeet.
66. Malabar Lorikeet.
67. Brown headed Storkbilled Kingfisher.
68. Malabar pied Hornbill.
69. Malabar Grey Hornbill.
70. Ceylon Hoopoe.
71. Malabar trogon.
72. Indian Alpine Swift.
73. Brown throated Spinetail Swift.
74. White Backed or Bengal Vulture.
75. Black Eagle.
76. Common Pariah Kite.
77. Pale Harrier.
78. Indian Spotted dove.
79. Jeydons Imperial Pigeon.
80. Grey Jungle Fowl (Munnar-Kumili).
81. Little Cormorant.
82. Indian Darter.
83. White-necked stork.
84. Cattle egret.
85. Indian Reef Heron.

The most magnificent of the birds I saw were the Malabar Trogon, with its brilliant colour and flowing white veil (much more beautiful than the picture in Salim Ali's book suggests), the young male Paradise Fly catcher with its chestnut streamers, "trailing in the breeze ... a spectacle of utmost grace and charm", the Fairy Blue bird, "brilliantly coloured, dazzling ultramarine above and deep velvety black below", the slim, brilliant, flame-coloured and black male orange minivet and the Vigor's yellow backed sunbird like a flashing ruby - all unmatched for their brilliance and beauty.

In his book Dr. Salim Ali mentions that there is no record for Travancore of nesting by a white necked stork. I saw one in its nest on a branch about 50 ft. above the ground on a tree about twice as high, on the banks just in front of Aranya Nivas. This was presumably seen by Mr. N.G. Pillai but not by Mrs. Ganguli or Mr. Neelakantan who visited the area later.

ROOST OF WHITE WAGTAILS IN BHUBANESWAR

By

S.D. Jayakar and Hari Pulugurtha
Genetics and Biometry Laboratory,
Government of Orissa.

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On November 25, 1964, we saw a flock of about 20 wagtails at 17.00 flying northwards over the market. Suspecting a roost, on 28 November, we again looked for flocks at the same time, saw them and chased them. Somewhat to our surprise, they settled on the roof of the Secretariat building which is five-storied. Many others joined them there in the next 15 minutes. Not hopeful of getting permission to enter the Secretariat after office hours, we decided to try to get onto the roof the next evening which, unfortunately, was a Sunday. However, after spending much time trying to contact administrators on the telephone, our friend

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Shri G.C. Dash, the Secretary for Agriculture, returned to Bhubaneswar, in the afternoon, and with his help and that of Shri Y.S. Patro, Under Secretary in the Political and Services Department, who personally escorted us, we mounted the roof, where as early as 16.27, there were already some wagtails, all Motacilla alba. At about 16.50, larger flocks started arriving. Between this time and 17.12, there were white (or pied) wagtails flying round the Secretariat and the Assembly building next to it. At 17.12, these started flying into trees opposite the Assembly building. These are roadside trees at the junction of two main roads which at this time of evening, are fairly busy, especially on weekdays as there are several Government offices nearby from which people go home after work. Eight of the 9 trees belong to the species Pongamia Pinnata or the Indian beech. The number of birds in the roost that day must have been over 200, all M. alba, and belonging to at least three sub-species. Since then, we have visited the roost several times, the last occasion being on 17 December, and the number of birds has increased considerably. On 5 December, the birds entered the trees between 17.06 and 17.23. However, on 17 December they did not start entering till 17.24.

STRANGE FEEDING HABIT OF THE LITTLE GREEN BITTERN

By

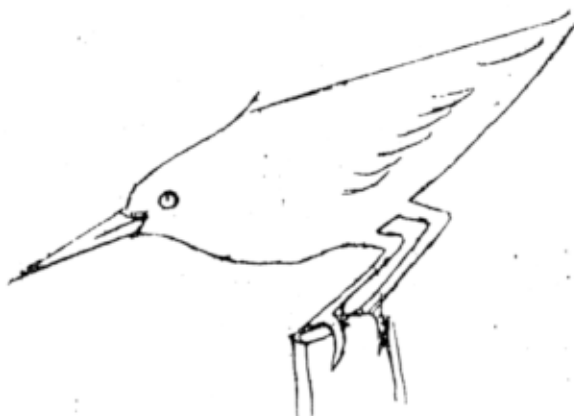
V. Uday Shankar Rao.

The members who partook in the field trip on the 10th January in Bombay were fortunate to witness a peculiar feeding habit of the Little Green Bittern. Our party consisted of Dr. Salim Ali, Mr. & Mrs. R. Thomas, Mr. Vreeland, Mr. Irani and myself. We were rambling along the bunded south bank of Tulsi Lake (in North Bombay) at about 7.30 a.m. when we spied a solitary Little Green Bittern perched on a stump projecting about a yard above the water near the bank.

The bird was in a peculiar posture with its head bent towards the water and its body at an angle of thirty degrees to the horizontal. It was scanning the water below very intently and was absolutely motionless. Mr. Irani, a bird artist quickly caught the bird's attitude on his drawing pad.



The Little Green Bittern in the 'Striking' posture described in the text (sketch by Mr. Irani):



After about ten minutes it flew to the base of a pillar supporting a small bridge and again stood in the same manner. The morning sun falling on its body revealed to us its striking body pattern of dark green, blackish grey and ashy grey. We waited patiently to know its intentions. Suddenly it dived into the water with a splash (rather like a Kingfisher but not so neatly) and picked up a small fish. It then flew to the bank and gulped it down after a little manoeuvring.

To our knowledge this manner of feeding by the Little Green Bittern has not been recorded before.

SOME BIRD NOTES FROM SUKKUR, WEST PAKISTAN
ADDENDUM

By

D. A. Holmes
Lower Indust Project, Sukkur, W. Pakistan
[Continued from Vol. 5(1): 9]

Some interesting birds seen in other parts of Sind between January 1963 and August 1964.

20. White Pelican : Pelecanus onocrotaphus
Large flocks up to 150 birds seen along the coast and near Karachi from October to December. All records are of flocks soaring and circling like vultures or storks. They were identified as this species by their pink flesh coloured legs when directly overhead.

50. Indian Reef Heron : Egretta gularis

A coastal bird, this was seen commonly up to 50 miles inland near Badin during the summer irrigation season. This seems a long way from the sea but in this region there is no distinct coast line, the land is very flat and barren, and waste irrigation water is apt to be as saline as the sea.

56. Chestnut Bittern : Ixobrychus cinnamomeus

Mainly recorded in reedbeds and seepage zones in SE. Sind.

71. Glossy Ibis : Plegadis falcinellus

My only ibis records are of flocks of this species, up to 300 at a time, feeding in irrigated fields in May 1963 near Badin.

72. Spoonbill : Platalea leucorodia

Said to breed in Sind but has only been recorded by me in flocks on Kalri Lake near Hyderabad in February and March 1963. Unlike the flamingos and cranes also present, they were very wary and flew long distances up the lake when disturbed.

73-74. Flamingo : Phoenicopterus spp.

Large flocks (up to 420) seen on Kalri Lake in February and March 1963, while others were seen in relatively inaccessible areas of the Rann of Kutch in June 1963.

178. Black Vulture : Torgos calvus

This rather fine turkey-like vulture was identified only once at Jati near the coast on 11 December. It was recognized immediately by its naked red head and neck with wattles, red feet and white thigh patches.

Waders: In addition to those mentioned in the notes on the Sukkur area the following waders have been recorded on the coast near the mouth of the Indus in the summer of 1963.

87. Curlew : Numenius arquata

Three on 9 June.

393-394. Common Redshank : Tringa totanus

Two on 9 June.

420. Dunlin : Calidris alpinus

Four seen on 9 June.

422. Curlew Sandpiper : Calidris testaceus

One with Dunlin on 9 June (my only record of this bird in Sind).

442. Collared Pratincole : Glareola pratincola

A rather rare bird, this was found to be very common on the barren saline wastes near the Rann of Kutch in June 1963. It is probably a summer visitor as none were seen there in December.

456. Slenderbilled Gull : Larus genii

Common in June 1963 in the same area as the pratincoles above. This is about the eastern limit of its range.

462. Caspian Tern : Hydroprogne caspia

This large and splendid tern was very common at Kalri Lake in February 1963 but other records, on the coast, in June and October, suggest that it may be resident.

578. Cuckoo : Cuculus canorus

One late departing bird was seen near Jacobabad on April 10, 1964. It seemed to dislike the heat (100° F. in the shade) as much as I did. It was resting in 2 inches of water in the bed of a nearly dry canal, and was very reluctant to flap away when approached too close.

606. Barn Owl : Tyto alba

In May 1963 a Barn Owl flew out of a ruined temple in the barren saline wastes near the Rann of Kutch. It caused me considerable surprise as I had no idea at that time that this typically English Owl occurred in the subcontinent. It shared the ruin with a pair of nesting Neophrons (Neophron percnopterus) and a pair of Spotted Owlets was present in the small patch of scrub outside. In such a desolate area the three species together with Whitecheeked Bulbuls (Pycnonotus leucogenys) and Yellowthroated Sparrows (Patronia xanthocollis) were certainly making the fullest use of the few facilities available to them.

884. Hoopoe Lark : Lalomon alaudipes

Sind is included in the range of this large interesting Desert Lark which is aptly named, for its rounded wings with prominent white bars are very reminiscent of the Hoopoe. It is quite common on the dreary saline wastes near the Rann of Kutch and in the hot clay levels of the Pat Desert west of Jacobabad, where almost nothing grows. Its song is said to be magnificent but I have only heard it once very indistinctly on a windy day in Pat Desert, when the sweet plaintive notes reminded me of the English Wood Lark (Julula arborea). To those who like myself know nothing of this bird, the first sight presents a problem in identification. Perched or running it is obviously a large lark but in flight its peculiar wings and flight appear to dismiss that possibility.

953. Golden Oriole : Oriolus oriolus

It is a pity that this delightful bird is no more than a rare passage migrant in Sind. I have only two records, both from tree line canals in SE. Sind on 20th and 26 August 1963.

1722. Rock Thrush : Menticola saxatilis

This rare migrant was seen near Karachi on 6 October 1963 and was the cause of some excitement as it was the only species of thrush I have seen in Sind.

1790-1797. Grey Tit : Parus major

One was present in a nesthouse garden near Jacobabad in late March 1964. Unfortunately it was just over the border of Baluchistan otherwise it would have constituted a first record for Sind. The habitat is however far more typical of Sind. It is interesting to speculate which subspecies it may have been. Presumably it was a winter bird from the mountains near Quetta.

1817. Penduline Tit : Remiz coronatus

Two were seen feeding in the heads of reeds beside a canal on 15th Feb. 1963 in the eastern part of Lower Sind. In Sind it appears to have been recorded once before (near Sukkur in the North) and this bird and the Grey Tit may be the rarest birds I have seen in Sind to date.

(Concluded)

 REVIEW

THE BOOK OF BIRD LIFE. By Arthur A. Allen. D. Van Nostrand Co. Inc., Princeton, New Jersey.

The happy title of this book exactly describes its subject and its function. It was first printed in 1930. It was reprinted eleven times, and recently a second edition was brought out which incorporated all the ornithological material which has been discovered since it was first written. In writing this book, Dr. Allen had set out to write a text book on ornithology (all American text books have plenty of coloured illustrations) which would equip its readers to do useful field work. It is not possible for an amateur to do useful work unless he knows something of the principles of classifica-

tions, distributions, adaptations, and what has already been discovered in the field of ethology. Neither does the birdwatcher want to be weighed down with technical laboratory impediments which have little relevance to field observations. Dr. Allen's book is nicely balanced on the thin line between the two extremes of being too popular and too technical.

The book is divided into two sections. The first called the Living Bird gives in general terms, all the background material, as it were, beginning with their history, and ending with their relations to man. The second part of the book describes the Methods of Bird Study. This section is as full of practical advice as a magazine article; but there is a breadth and a constant reference to scientific principles that prevents the reader from forgetting the fact that the writer is one of the foremost ornithologists in America. The one drawback for Indian readers is the heavy orientation of the book. Still, as long as we have in this country only one ornithologist who is capable of writing books, we must make up our minds to accept whatever offers from other countries. And Dr. Allen's book is on the whole, an offering to satisfy the most demanding birdwatcher.

(L.F.)

NOTES AND COMMENTS

Role of birds in our National Economy

With the assistance of the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, the Bombay Natural History Society is making a study of the role of birds in our National Economy. Dr. Salim Ali is the Principal Investigator, and his two assistants are Mr. P.V. George and Mr. P. Kannan. George is studying the status of migratory birds in Indian Economy. One interesting problem here is to find out if the migrants compete with the resident population for food, and if so with what result. Since they occupy similar biotopes some competition is understandable. Some of these migrants from northern countries are potential carriers of viruses, and therefore have a direct bearing on public health and livestock welfare.

Kannan is engaged in the study of the problem of flower pollination by birds in India. In many plant species of great economic importance fertilisation of flowers is largely effected through the agency of birds. Birds visiting flowers for nectar transfer the pollen adhering to the feathers of the forehead and the throat to other flowers. Some flowers of the genus Loranthus do not open until a flowerpecker or a sunbird nips the top of the closed petals. These studies will be of great value to Indian Ornithology.

CORRESPONDENCE

'BIRDS AND SNAKES'

I was most interested in Miss Lewis's letter in the December issue of the Newsletter on this subject. Our readers may be interested to know that Col. Meinertzhagen in his PRIMATES AND PREDATORS (p. 41) has this to say about the Ground Hornbill (Bucervus cafer) — presumably an African species — engaging and killing snakes:

"But occasionally the ground hornbill, usually in small parties, will tackle large and dangerous snakes.

Ayres (Ibis, 1861, p. 132) gives the following account: 'On discovering a snake, three or four of the birds will advance sideways towards it, all their wings stretched, to irritate the snake till he strikes at them with his wings fastened. They immediately turn round and strike the snake with their bills. The snake is then killed and the birds feed on it.'

NEWSLETTER

FOR BIRDWATCHERS

Volume 5-1965 March



NEWSLETTER
FOR
BIRDWATCHERS

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CONTENTS

Notes from Madras. By R.A. Stewart Mellsuish ..	1
Fundamental research in ornithology. By Jamal Ara ..	5
The nesting of the Heartspotted Woodpecker. By K.K. Neelakantan ..	6
The danger of the air-gun. By Miss Phyllis Barclay-Smith, M.B.E., M.B.O.U. ..	8
Review:	
BIRDS OF THE WORLD. (S.D. Jayakar) ..	9
Notes and Comments ..	9

Correspondence:

Food washing by the Water Rail. By S.K. Reeves (p. 9); A note on the Indian Ring Dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*). By S. K. Reeves (p. 10); Plumage of the Paradise Flycatcher. By Miss Miriam D. Brown (p. 11); A Jungle Crow conceals food. By V. N. Kelkar (p. 12); Birdwatching in America. By Nissin Ezekiel (p. 12)

NOTES FROM MADRAS

By

R.A. Stewart Mellsuish

Hardly anything has been published recently about the bird life or population of the south-eastern littoral of India, and except for one or two noteworthy occasions the Newsletter has grown to respectable maturity with rarely a nod in our direction. This isn't the fault of the Newsletter, or of its tireless editor*: it is the fault of people like me. For the impression this silence gives, that there are either no birds here, or no birdwatchers, is far from true, and I hope this note will do something to put the place on the map for readers of this bulletin.

No birdwatcher who visits the city of Madras for a few days in winter need (yet) deliberately avoid a trip out to the sanctuary at Vedanthangal. But he should arrange to stay long enough to go further afield, and not rest content with what is little more than armchair watching: for, though the birds there are entirely free, and there is probably nowhere else locally where the larger waterbirds like spoonbill and ibis can be seen at their nests so conveniently, the celebrated Vedanthangal is not unlike a zoo and if any more municipal cannas and carpark notices are planted

*Should read 'tired editor'. - Ed.

and garden seats and observation towers erected many birdwatchers will be driven away. There are plenty of other interesting places to visit, and the reactionary like me who really much prefers birdwatching when it involves some physical discomfort and effort, can exercise himself well. The mudflats to the west of Point Calimere, for example -- mile upon mile of glutinous ooze -- are a severe challenge to any enthusiast's stamina.

Calimere is, ornithologically, of the first quality. It was described briefly by Dr. Salim Ali in the Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society (Vol. 60, No.2) after a visit there in November 1962 to find out whether it would make a suitable site for a shore-birds sanctuary for the Madras government to run. Nothing has yet come of this proposal, evidently, for only a few weeks ago the local Mail newspaper carried an article by the State Wild Life Officer, who is understandably devoted to the place, pleading for a wider recognition of its merits and the establishment of a sanctuary there. It is clear that commercial interest in the making of salt on the tidal flats would have to be overcome before a truly undisturbed wild-life reserve would be practicable -- at least, one of any size -- and it is the salt industry that is the greatest threat, at present, to the remoteness and secluded beauty of the marsh: for to make salt nowadays you need electricity to drive pumps, roads for tractors, and a mass of labourers, all enemies of reactionary birdwatchers, if not of birds.

Point Calimere is in Tanjore district, where the Coromandel Coast stops running due south and turns abruptly west to form the northern fringe of the Palk Strait between India and Ceylon. My map omits trivial details like a scale (I had to draw it myself, because of those blasted Chinamen), but it would seem that from about three miles to twenty miles west of the point the shore is merely a thin strip of sand, occasionally broken by the mouths of creeks, dividing the strait from a huge zone of mud, expanses of shallow, brackish water, and islets. If you go by motor, as I did on my first visit, you drive to Vedaranniyam from the nearest town in the hinterland, which is Tiruturaipoondi, and thence across the eastern edge of the flats to Kodikkarai on the coast. Kodikkarai is one of those melancholy, silent ends of the world where Man gives up and sea and sky take over. The road peters out with a notice announcing, with laconic finality, 'End'. The South Indian Railway built a line from Tiruturaipoondi to Kodikkarai, however, so if you like trains you can travel overnight from Egmore in Madras and arrive in time to breakfast on the shore. The last stage of the journey, in the dawning light, when you sense the nearness of the sea, is immensely refreshing and stimulating.

The moment you leave Vedaranniyam you are amongst the birds. In winter, at least, and according to the foresters all the year round, the western horizon over what they call the swamp is fringed with a pink line of flamingoes. This is not one of the world's great flamingo feeding-grounds: the numbers are relatively few -- from all accounts, not more than five thousand roseus in winter -- but it is probably the best the south of India can offer. The numbers at Pulicat have not, as far as I know, recently exceeded one thousand. If there are any larger concentrations of these birds regularly in south India known to any reader of the Newsletter I hope he will publish the fact, because the seasonal movements and habits of this species away from their known breeding grounds in India seem to have been little documented, in spite of its conspicuous and interesting appearance.

If you are new to flamingoes, you set off after them, no doubt, and begin your day-long plot through the mud and water. Flamingoes' feet are a better shape than yours, though, for mud, and they can walk faster than you can, so once they realise you are anxious to watch them or photograph them, and not simply catch shrimps like a local fisherman, they wander nonchalantly away. They seem to prefer to taunt you in this way rather than take to their wings, and so, perhaps, give you the opportunity you may be seeking to photograph them, or just admire them, in flight. But the effort of tramping through the mud, slow though the progress is, and however foolish the flamingoes make you feel, is well worth while; indeed, it is essential if you are to see much else, because although you can engage a local boat it will hinder as much as help you, and anyway it must stick to where there's water.

If you do wade out, and there is mud and water in the right quantities and the time of year is satisfactory, you will see a great deal. Dr. Salim Ali, in 1962, undertook a trial catch of waders with a local fowler's device consisting of a row of nooses, 'strung out at random along the mudflats', and so in a very short time collected, of the Charadriidae, lesser sand plover, redshank, marsh sandpiper, wood sandpiper, little stint, Kentish plover, ruff, and a single rednecked phalarope. Of these, only the last can be regarded as unusual: and though I have seen ruff on one of my three visits to Calimere I would not call it a common winter visitor to these coasts. The other species caught are to be seen in abundance at any suitable spot in Madras at the right time of year, but doubtless in larger numbers at Calimere than elsewhere. If the visitor there is lucky in his timing, he will find the mud on the landward side of the shore one scurrying, fidgeting, chittering, fluttering mass of small waders, frenziedly poking about in the slime in their hunt for food. He will see terek sandpipers in sizeable flocks of fifty or more, quantities of little ringed plover and greenshank; also stilt, curlew-sandpiper, large sand plover and turnstone. He may even spot, among the stints, a group of larger chubbier birds with downcurved beaks which, when flushed, do not show the tell-tale white upper tail coverts of the curlew-sandpiper: these are probably dunlin. I saw four of these birds at Calimere on 12 January 1964, but I have not been able to get the record confirmed in any way: they are not, evidently, one of the common wintering birds that reach the south regularly. And who knows how many Temminck's, broadbilled and longtoed stints, sanderlings and other such tiny snippets pass the field observer by unnoticed in the mass of confused movement and hasty flight?

The larger, more sedate birds are there too: rows of plump golden plover stand in the shallows, all facing the wind; a bartailed godwit probes about in the banks of a creek; whimbrels hasten overhead whistling their seven whistles; a party of grey and white plover, squatarola, beat upwind with a neat and precise motion of their wings, their black axillaries rhythmically flashing; a curlew calls, and a number rise languidly from their feeding, disturbed, perhaps, by the impetuous flighting of nervous stints and plover zigzagging between them. These, together with the usual egrets, herons and storks, and the terns, which fill the air with their squawks and buoyant flight (mostly Caspian, whiskered, gullbilled and lesser crest-ed) make up the bulk of the great, seemingly limitless, concentration of birds which, in winter, dominate the mud.

Engrossed in all this, the birdwatcher may well neglect the shore itself. For if he turns away from the mud and all the activity, and looks towards the strait, the world is immediately empty -- except for some dauntless butterfly fluttering

off towards Ceylon an inch or two above the waves, or a brown-headed gull. The transformation is astonishing. The sea, for all its fidgeting waves and the shimmering facets of its surface, is relatively lifeless, and its shore vacant. It is curious how dull tropical shores can be, and how fruitless a watch on one so often proves. If one sits on a cliff at the edge of the Baltic, or spends an afternoon on a headland in Norfolk, and scans the waves, something or other is sure to turn up. Geese will fly purposefully along the coast, a fulmar will wheel over the crests of distant waves, a raft of scoter or merganser will appear, or some diver-like blob will attract one's attention a mile or more out to sea, unidentifiable, baffling, but hypnotic and fascinating for hours. This just doesn't seem to happen on the southern coasts of India; at least, all my shore watches on the Madras coast have been most disappointing.

To dismiss the shore, though, is a mistake. There is little doubt that the Palk Strait off Calimere offers a lot of excitement in the months when the migrations are on; for Ceylon entertains many visitors from the centre of Asia, and many if not the majority of these must cross the strait. An expedition to Calimere in September or October ought to be most rewarding, and give a new dimension to one's view of the sea and its shores. And the birdwatcher who goes there after the main movements are over, as I have done, should remember that apart from the conspicuous oyster-catcher there is at least one remarkable shore-dwelling bird which is unlikely to be noticed at all unless one deliberately and diligently examines the tideline: the improbable crab plover. This extraordinary bird -- so odd that it is classified in a family of its own, Dromadidae, all by itself -- is thoroughly at home on the remote undisturbed beaches west of the point, and there would seem to be little reason why it should not burrow its quaint tunnels in the sand there, and breed its solitary young. Ripley says it breeds off Ceylon at Adam's Bridge, but does not mention its nesting in India. If any reader of the Newsletter knows anything about its movements and possible or actual breeding localities, I should be very glad if they got in touch with me. For this bird has excited a deep curiosity in me, since I spent one afternoon last November watching a party of seven at Calimere. They didn't do anything much, these birds, except wash and preen themselves, and then prospect a little along the water's edge. But their heavy bills and pied plumage and generally singular appearance enthralled me, and I sat on the sand and watched them through a telescope for the best part of two hours, and was only roused from my reverie by what seemed to me an abrupt and ill-considered decision of the tide to rise and smother me. No other birds seem so completely in tune as these with the atmosphere of remote, unpeopled seclusion which prevails over faraway and almost inaccessible shores, and the sight of them justifies any number of barren days spent on empty coasts.

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FUNDAMENTAL RESEARCH IN ORNITHOLOGY

By

Jamal Ara

I often feel that there are many ornithological problems for which a solution in the field cannot be found. Let me make it clear straightaway that I am NOT making a plea for the collection of more dead ornithological material. On that point I hold the view very strongly that collection of skins for identifications or Museums must cease now. What I am pleading for is more fundamental research in the laboratory, by using body fluids and similar materials from living birds.

Let us consider, for example, the sexual diversifications in the same Order and even in the same Family. There appears to be no apparent cause behind the sparrows having the sexes dissimilar and the Drongos having them alike. But suppose the chromosome structure of both the species was studied. This will involve no discomfort to the bird, nor will it be necessary to kill. All that is needed is to catch one, extract a few drops of blood with a fine needle and hypodermic syringe, and then set the bird free.

The best time to observe chromosome structure and numbers is at the moment of cell division; in the higher animals it is generally meiosis. For this, the blood and particularly the white corpuscles will have to be cultured, and killed as soon as cell division starts. I am not aware of the chromosomes of birds having been studied anywhere so far, but I am certain that by careful selection specimens can be studied under a high magnification optical microscope.

It may well be that such a study gives us a clue as to why some birds are sexually dissimilar and others not. Perhaps the chromosomes of the sparrow may show something like the X and Y pairs of the human chromosome, and those of the Drongo none at all. Or the structures may be something unknown to Biological Science so far.

The possibilities of this line of research are practically limitless. Take the problem of migration. All theories so far have been empirical. It has been assumed that birds migrate when the breeding instinct either reaches a certain point of development or decays down to a particular level. Arising out of this, it has been suggested that the length of daylight and average temperatures may have an important role to play. But there is one aspect which is even more fundamental -- what determines that a certain species shall be migratory and another not; or that the instinct in some other species shall only cause a local movement. Granted that search for adequate food generated an instinct that strengthened through the centuries until it perfected itself into the mass movements we witness today. But more basic than all this is the question: is there anything in the structure of the bird itself that has undergone modification under the stress of this migratory instinct? Again an analysis of the chromosome structure of both migratory and non-migratory birds may provide the answer. It is quite possible that there is some particular development which is either present or absent in migratory species, and a partial presence or absence leads to local migration.

There is one possibility here which is positively fascinating.

Take the case of the migratory and non-migratory teals. Can it be that say, the migratory one is the normal diploid, i.e. having the normal number of chromosomes, and the non-migratory one is a polyploid, i.e. it has three times or four times the normal number. If this speculation -- fantastic though it sounds -- turns out to be correct, it will be possible to create a non-migratory variety of the migratory species by inducing polyploidy artificially. I know that this sounds very much like science fiction, but is not outside the realms of possibility. It is well known that polyploidy in plants gives rise to fantastic changes.

A further refinement of this line of research is, of course, much more difficult and calls for very expensive equipment, but it has limitless vistas, and may help to solve problems in other branches of Natural History. So far the Mendelian theory is only a statistical approach to the problems of heredity. Through an Electron Microscope, however, it is possible to study the characters of genes, those tiny bodies inside a chromosome which determine what parental characteristics will be inherited by the offspring. Now, the inherited characters of birds are so fixed, being much more stable than in the case of plants, that a study of the genes here can be of immense help in making the Laws of Mendel more precise. Again, the environment in which birds breed can be controlled easily, since many birds will breed freely in captivity, and in this way the extent to which environment influences heredity, determined once and for all. Lysenko has been deposed, but there are aspects of his theory which deserve fuller and more impartial investigation.

To conclude, it is time attention is focussed on studying the chromosome number and structure of birds. This needs neither very expensive equipment nor any elaborate expedition to collect skins. A start can be made with the homely sparrow, the thieving crow (why is it a thief?) and the common myna.

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THE NESTING OF THE HEARTSPOTTED WOODPECKER

By

K.K. Neelakantan

On the 29th of December 1964, I spent a few hours birdwatching, at Kulathupuzha, some 38 miles north of Trivandrum. As I was the guest, for the day, of Sri A.S. Monie, Divisional Forest Officer, Trivandrum, I spent most of the time in the extensive timber-yard of the Forest Department. It was quite an extensive place, being on the bank of a river and close to the extensive forest.

Unfortunately, the most interesting thing turned up late in the day, just thirty minutes before our departure. It was a male Heartspotted Woodpecker (Hemicircus canente) attending to young in the nest. Earlier I had had a few glimpses of a Heartspotted Woodpecker as it flew about uttering tchlik-tchlik notes, but I had failed to keep track of its movements. At 3.30 p.m. as I was watching a Grey Tit, a male Heartspotted Woodpecker came and alighted on a tree close by. As soon as it had alighted, it commenced bowing and calling. Perched across a slender twig, the bird stiffly lowered its head and simultaneously uttered a thin, plaintive su-sie, exactly like the tu-tec note of the Plaintive Cuckoo, but very much lower. After repeating this

antic ten or twelve times, the bird flew to a Terminalia paniculata tree some 20 feet away. Perched on a slender branch, it again bowed and su-sie-ed a number of times. Now and then it looked upwards and all around as though it expected its mate or young to come for the food it was carrying conspicuously in the bill. This was something white or cream-coloured, filling the whole bill and preventing the bird from closing the bill properly. From this branch which was some 20 feet above the ground, the bird flew down to a stump 8 feet lower down. It alighted on the stump and swiftly slid and sidled down to the underside. At the tip of the dead stump was a depression and here the bird had tunnelled its nest. Clinging to the nest-entrance, the bird thrust its head in four or five times, and then shot off, uttering the tchlik-tchlik notes. The time was 3.35. At 3.40 it was back. After bowing and su-sie-ing a number of times, it went to the nest. But at 3.42 it flew off without feeding the young. At 3.43 it returned, bowed and su-sie-ed, but again flew off without even going near the nest. Though I suspected that the bird had seen me and was feeling annoyed, I was more than 25 feet away and kept fairly still. Moreover, the nest was almost above a path regularly used by local people.

At 3.47 the bird came again, went through the usual preliminaries, and entered the nest. A minute later it flew off. At 4.5 it was back on a tree 25 feet away, bowing and su-sie-ing. From there it flew to the nest, put its head in a number of times, entered the nest, and, turning round, looked out. At that time there was some white stuff hanging from its bill, but it didn't look like a faecal sack. The bird then retracted its head, and its bill was open and empty when it looked out a few seconds later. Before the bird left its nest I had to return to my host's office. We left a few minutes later.

During the 30 minutes for which I had the nest under observation, there was no sign of the female woodpecker. In fact the only Heartspotted Woodpecker I saw was this single bird -- a male as the black forehead showed. Though the bird was constantly uttering one note or the other, there was no answering call throughout the period. Where could the female have gone?

There seem to be only three earlier reports of the nesting of this woodpecker from Travancore: C. Primrose took single eggs on November 26th and December 15th (J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc. 35:207) and Bourdillon (Stray Feathers 4:389) found it excavating in February. Mr. Stewart found it brooding from January to March (J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc. 37:296). Therefore the details of the nest seen by me may be worth recording. The nest was just 12 feet above the ground in a small tree. There were numerous huge trees with plenty of dead stumps at all heights from 6 ft. to 50 or 60 feet. The thick forest was also but a few furlongs away. The bird, however, had chosen the slender stump which stood close to a frequented path in a rather noisy locality.

Again Betts (J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc. 37:201) and Salim Ali (BIRDS OF TRAVANCORE AND COCHIN:207-8) say that the call of this woodpecker is 'a pleasant trill consisting of a quick-repeated twec-twec-twec -- sharp but not loud -- up to 7 or 8 times.' On the 29th of December I never heard the bird uttering this note. When it flew about, it constantly produced a sharp, double note tchlik-tchlik. When it had alighted and while it bowed, it uttered the plaintive su-sie note.

Betts in his excellent article on South Indian Woodpeckers (referred to above) remarks that the only Woodpecker seen with

food in its bill when visiting the nest is the Pigmy Woodpecker. We should certainly enlarge the list to include the Heartspotted species also.

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THE DANGER OF THE AIR-GUN

By

Phyllis Barclay-Smith, M.B.E., M.B.O.U.

Central Secretary, International Council for Bird Preservation

The increase in accidents caused by air-guns and the numbers of birds killed and wounded by these weapons has given rise to considerable concern in the United Kingdom and other European countries.

At the Meeting of the European Continental Section of the International Council for Bird Preservation held in Norway in 1961 the delegates from several countries reported on the danger of these guns and it was agreed to recommend that no-one under the age of 16 years should be allowed to use such guns and representatives of some countries were of the opinion that air-guns should not be allowed to be used by anyone under 18 years of age.

In 1961 a law was passed in the Netherlands restricting the use of air-guns and in 1962 a law was passed in the United Kingdom forbidding children under 14 to have air-guns except under the supervision of some one over 21, and also establishing certain controls concerning young persons of a higher age.

The destruction of birds and number of accidents to farm animals and even humans caused by irresponsible shooters, however, became so much worse in the United Kingdom that the leading association of farmers -- the National Farmers' Union -- in 1963 organised a Conference of representatives of landowners, sportsmen and conservation organizations to discuss further legislation to deal with this problem.

A large number of reports were received from all over the country not only of destruction and maiming of birds but of shooting at farm animals. In one case the calf of a cow, which had been hit by pellets, was born dead and in another a mare in-foal was found in a bad state with blood dripping from a shoulder wound caused by an air-gun pellet. Another farmer was himself hit by an air-gun pellet fired by a boy. Some hand-reared tame Mallard on a pond near a house, which were very tame, were shot down on the water -- some were dead but the majority horribly maimed.

There is at present (1965) a Bill before the British Parliament for the stricter control of shooting.

There is no doubt that many youths carrying air-guns will shoot at any bird they see or indeed at anything that moves, and can be dangerous for both farm animals and humans. The air-gun can no longer be regarded as a harmless toy and it is important that it should not be allowed to be used by irresponsible youths. The bird life of India will greatly suffer and there will be much trouble if precautions are not taken to control air-guns as the experiences of other countries have shown.

REVIEWS

BIRDS OF THE WORLD. By Hans Hvas, in colour, translated by Gwynne Vevers, illustrated by Wilhelm Eigener. New York. E. P. Dutton and Co. Inc.

This excellent book consists of fully coloured illustrations of 1100 species of birds, accompanied by short accounts of them. There are summaries of each family including the numbers of species it includes, its distribution, a general description, the more interesting habits of the family, the habitats they frequent and other facts about them. This is followed by the Latin and English common names of the species illustrated, with its size, distribution and some of its particular habits.

The species selected are fairly representative over the world. The illustrations are on the whole extremely good. Many, perhaps most, of them are probably copied from a previous illustration, and in some cases previous mistakes are carried over. It is natural that in such short descriptions of species (anything from under 10 words to over 100) not many details can be given, but it is unfortunate that sexual dimorphism and seasonal variations are often not even mentioned.

There is an index of common names. The book is invaluable as a reference book to have with one when one is reading books about birds in different countries. It has certainly made reading Gerald Durrell's books much more interesting.

The book has a hard cover and for Rs26.00, it is indeed a wonderful bargain.

(S.D. Jayakar)

NOTES AND COMMENTS

We are glad to announce that Mr. R.A. Stewart Helliush whose article appears in this issue has agreed to act as our Regional Editor from Madras.

We can now look forward to increased activity in South India.

CORRESPONDENCE

Food washing by the Water Rail

Reading Mr. Uday Shanker Rao's note in the February issue regarding the strange feeding behaviour of the Little Green Bittern, I was reminded of an incident in the feeding behaviour of the Water Rail (*Rallus aquaticus*) which struck me at the time as being singularly odd.

Ten years or so ago, I had a Water Rail under observation at a large pond at Leatherhead in Surrey, at a site locally known as Fetcham Crossbeds. The bird was in a tree and bush-studded island in the pond about 5 yards from the water's edge. After a few moments, I saw the bird pick up a worm in its bill, run quickly to the water's edge and wash the worm in the water by rapidly moving its bill from side to side. It then ran 2 or 3 yards back on to the island and swallowed the worm.

Foodwashing is, I believe, a habit practised, if not regularly, at least occasionally, by other species of birds, mainly the Scolopacidae (waders).

Have any other of our readers ever witnessed this? If they have, it would be most interesting to hear of their experiences.

S.K. Reeves

Gt. Bookham, Surrey, England

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A note on the Indian Ring Dove (Streptopelia decaocto)

At the end of the very interesting 'Extracts from letters to friends in India', written by Dr. N.W. Cusa and published in the February issue of the Newsletter, he asks, inter alia, whether the Indian Ring Dove, variously called Streptopelia decaocto and risoria, is the same bird which we know in Europe as the Collared Dove or whether they are two separate species.

The answer to his question is that they are, in fact, one and the same species, more than that, they both belong to the typical race, namely Streptopelia decaocto decaocto.

Streptopelia risoria is an older name by which the bird used to be known.

There is a subspecies (S. d. xanthocyclus) known as the Burmese Ring Dove, which occurs throughout Burma and extends from there into south and central China and the Indo-Chinese countries. The Burmese race is distinguished from the Indian by the broad, yellow, bare rings round the eye, deeper and brighter coloration and a more developed collar. The typical race (S. d. decaocto) extends eastwards, through Burma and China to Japan.

The spread of the typical race of the Collared Dove, sometimes by leaps of several hundred miles, from the Balkans in 1900, across Europe to reach Britain in the early 1950s, has been remarkable. It was first seen in Norfolk, where it established its first colony. Since then it has bred in many countries widely-spread over Great Britain and has occurred in many more. I, personally, have had the pleasure of seeing the bird and hearing its soft cooing call, so redolent of the hot, sunny, dusty plains of Gujarat, in Norfolk, Surrey, Gloucester and Cornwall. On the way home across France last May, at Soissons, I quite unexpectedly heard one calling one hot, drowsy afternoon in the tree-lined street in which our hotel was located, and for one brief, exciting moment I thought I was back in India. Later on, I discovered three or four more in the environs of the hotel.

In this country, the bird is often to be found near poultry runs, especially those which have evergreen trees and prominent perches, such as overhead wires, television aerials, high roofs, etc., in their vicinity. The doves, needless to say, share the grain put down for the chickens.

S.K. Reeves

Gt. Bookham, Surrey, England

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Plumage of the Paradise Flycatcher

The February issue of the Newsletter has just come. In Dr. Mani's interesting article on birds at Thakkady she says, '....the young male Paradise Flycatcher with its chestnut streamers....'

Salim Ali's THE BOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS 1941 edition says concerning the same bird: 'Female and young male chestnut above, greyish white below . . The young male has chestnut streamers in the tail . . '

Whistler's POPULAR HANDBOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS 1935 edition states that 'The plumages of the male are not fully understood . . A phase in which the long streamers and the upper parts are chestnut instead of white may be dimorphic to the fully white adult.'

During last year's cool season a short-tailed Paradise Flycatcher became interested in the human population of this mission compound. It (we assumed it was one individual) would perch in the trees near our houses, would flit above and beside me as I walked under the trees, and as the weather grew hot would come into my second storey bedroom during the day whether I was there or not. In March it grew a white feather on each shoulder, so we knew it was a male, and we knew it was one individual. We saw, from time to time, others that had a white feather here or there in their chestnut plumage, or none at all, but always the 'tame' one had the two symmetrically placed on his shoulders.

One thing I noticed about him during his juvenile plumage was that his white feathers were a clear bright white, not ashy grey like that of the 'females'. When he left on April 15th, we were anxious to have him come back to us in whatever his new plumage was, and to resume his 'Peoplewatching'.

Early in October there were Paradise Flycatchers in the compound in various phases of plumage, but all were shy of humans, until in the last week of the month a beautiful male in white, black, and grey, with a tail about 8 inches long, began visiting the trees near our houses. Often when I went into the garden it would fly from a distant tree to one nearby. It gradually resumed its habits of the previous year, making regular visits to the verandah trellises, perching outside the windows of the school and hospital. During the worst fury of the cyclone on December 23rd, he flew in to the verandah trellis at noon, as is his custom, and there rested in shelter for a while before flying out again into the storm.

He is still here, and every once in a while I measure his tail by observing him on a perch. A week ago I calculated that it was thirteen inches. It will be interesting to see how long it is by the time he migrates.

All of us who have watched the birds of this compound believe this to be the same individual that we knew last year, although it was not ringed. If we are correct, the description of his plumage may throw some light on that of the species in general.

Miriam D. Brown

Singaratope, Ramnad, Madras State

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A Jungle Crow conceals food

On 14 May 1964 at about 0630 hrs. I observed a jungle crow alight in the field near my house with a dead lizard in its beak. It put the lizard on the ground, gave it one or two jabs with its beak and decided for some reason to postpone the feast. It thrust the lizard into a small depression in the ground and covered it with a stump ~~xxxxxx~~ of grass and roots almost completely and flew away. On going near I could see only the tail of the lizard which by evening had disappeared. Is the action of the crow in hiding food instinct or intelligence?

V.N. Kolkar

'Uday', 722 AB Navi Peth, Poona 2

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Birdwatching in America

The following passage may be of interest to the readers of the Newsletter. It is from the article 'If you dont mind my saying so . . .', by Joseph Wood Krutch in The American Scholar, quarterly, Autumn 1964.

"Americans have rediscovered Nature. Books about animals, plants, mountains and oceans pour in an unprecedented stream from the presses because they are being bought in unprecedented numbers. No doubt this is partly because we can no longer take nature for granted; because a beautiful world is disappearing under the impact of an exploding population and the 'progress' it makes necessary. Birdwatchers, once eccentric figures of fun, are now too numerous to be laughed at. The Audubon Society estimates that there are some ten million of them in the United States. The head of one of our largest corporations has published a splendid book about hummingbirds and it has even been suggested that on a fine weekend there are more people out with binoculars than in the football or baseball stadia."

Nissin Ezekiel

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NEWSLETTER

FOR BIRDWATCHERS

Volume 5-1965 April



NEWSLETTER
FOR
BIRDWATCHERS

Vol. 5, No. 4

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CONTENTS

The Ashy Minivet, <u>Pericrocotus cinereus</u> Lafresn. : An addition to the Indian Avifauna. By Rev. A. Navarro, S.J.	1
A Peahen nests on a roof. By (Mrs.) Usha Ganguli ..	4
Birds in a Calcutta Garden. By J.N. McKelvie,	6
Attachment to winter quarters in a Blue Rock Thrush. By S.S. Saha	7
Review:	
CONSERVATION AND YOU. (L.F.)	8
Notes and Comments	9
Correspondence:	
Newsletter stirs boyhood memories. By S.K. Reeves (p. 9);	
Birdlife in Delhi. By W.D.C. Erskine Crum (p. 9); The habit of the Koel. By A. David (p. 10)	

THE ASHY MINIVET, PERICROCOTUS CINEREUS LAFRESN.:
AN ADDITION TO THE INDIAN AVIFAUNA

By

Rev. A. Navarro, S.J.

On 31st of January, 1965, I went out to Funnel Hill (Karnala) with some of my friends with the intention of spending the day rambling through the forest there. After a mile or so from Panvel along the Poona Road there is a comparatively new junction road that goes to Goa, Ratnagiri, Mahabaleshwar, etc. At the beginning the road passes through paddyfields, and only after a short distance from there does it enter and run through a beautiful forest for about three to four miles.

At practically the end of this forest to its left is situated Funnel Hill, with Karnala Fort at the top of it, one of the most picturesque spots you may love to see within sixty miles of Bombay. (Let me add in parenthesis that the charcoal makers and wood-cutters, the wolves of the forest, have for a long time now set their gaze on this beautiful haunt of God's lovely creation, but with an ulterior purpose. That intention is certainly not for the improvement of the forest but to denude the hillsides of its exuberant and beautiful vegetation so that the hill, at the time of the unmerciful monsoon, is

left to the ravages of the rains which will wash clean its soil and leave it for ever a bare hill, lifeless and bereft of all vegetation. - Thus they will deprive the cultivated lands of the neighbourhood of these forests and their economic value which this near-by forest stands for!)

The forest consists of all kinds of jungle trees with small scattered patches of jungle teak-wood. The main difficulty with this forest is that from the end of February until the next monsoon there is not a drop of water to be found anywhere in it. Nevertheless this unfortunate condition, in my opinion, makes the spot all the more interesting since it has two definite seasons -- the monsoon season and the dry season. Two different groups of birds visit it -- or to put it in another way -- two different fauna. Many birds will be seen in it during both seasons; and for a certainty, some birds inhabit it in larger numbers during one season than the other.

At the beginning of the monsoon last year we saw plenty of shamas, Whistling thrushes, and Blackbirds. This group cannot easily be seen during the dry season. It is not my purpose here to give a list of all the birds that I have observed in my visits to Funnel Hill; we may leave that for another occasion. Yet we may mention a few which are of some interest, viz.: on more than one occasion I have seen the Heart-spotted Woodpecker, the Emerald Dove is pretty common, about six varieties of flycatchers have I counted on some occasions. The small sunbird, Nectarinia minima, is very common in the place where I have seen the best specimens. On my last visit there I saw for the first time the Bronzed Drongo.

However, let us now delve into the main object of this article. It must have been around 11 o'clock when I was almost at the top of the hill, on the right side of the road, when suddenly a noisy party, made up mostly of Warblers, Flycatchers, and some birds of another variety, were enjoying themselves in a delightful cacophony in a very thick patch of the forest. My attention was called by a pair of birds calling to each other incessantly. Their calls were altogether unfamiliar to me as much as their colour was. I sat down on the ground for almost ten minutes observing. Finally I was convinced that the birds I was observing were something I had never seen before. So I decided there and then to secure at least one specimen of them.

Luckily I did secure one of them. After examining it with some care I placed it, not without some misgivings, in the group of the Pied Shrike of the genus Hemipus. Later in the evening at the foot of Funnel Hill two more pairs came my way as they flew through the thickest part of the forest. Once I got home I examined the specimen more carefully and saw that it was the Ashy Minivet.

Consulting the SYNOPSIS OF THE BIRDS OF INDIA AND PAKISTAN I got all puzzled as to why Dr. Ripley had omitted the Ashy Minivet from his SYNOPSIS. The next day Mr. Daniel, the Curator of the Bombay Natural History Society, confirmed that my identification was correct and pointed out that the geographical distribution of this minivet given by Stuart Baker on the FAUNA OF BRITISH INDIA is entirely out of the Indian Union. The distribution given in the FAUNA is as follows:

"Breeding in Japan Amus and most possible Northern China -- Indo-Chinese countries, Philippines, Sumatra, Borneo, Malay -- entering south Burma as a very rare straggler only."

Hence we came to the conclusion that the specimen collected con-

-stituted a new addition to the Indian Avifauna.

Thanks to the staff of the Bombay Natural History Society, I can reproduce a few quotations from well-known ornithological papers. It is curious to note that all unanimously considered the Ashy Minivet to be not only a rare bird, even within their geographical status, but also the most outstanding and conspicuous species within the genus:

THE BIRDS OF THE PHILIPPINES, Parts III and IV, by Hachisuka, p. 367: 'This is a Palaearctic breeding bird wintering in the Tropics and appears in the Philippines during migration only and is, as a rule, very rare. It is at times however in considerable numbers.'

The Ibis, 1877, Vol. I, 4th series, p. 19: R. Bowdler Sharpe writes: 'This is the first accorded occurrence of the species in Borneo (probably January 1877) shot in the early part of the NE. Monsoon.'

FAUNA OF BRITISH INDIA, Birds Vol. II, p. 334 E.C. Stuart Baker says: 'This is the most migratory of all the minivets.'

Gould's BIRDS OF ASIA, Part VII-XII, states: 'The Greg Pericrocotus is unquestionably the rarest species of the genus, there being few museums in which an example is to be found. In its structure and the general disposition of its markings it is in every respect a typical member of the genus, while in the total absence of red or yellow colouring in either sex, it differs very conspicuously from every other that is at present known. A marked difference occurs in the sexes; the female being destitute of the white forehead and of the jet black back of the head and nape of the male; the sides of his breast and flanks are also more strongly washed with light grey; but with the exception of these distinctions they are very similar. 'It is a native of Luzon and the Philippine Islands.'

CHECK-LIST OF BIRDS OF THE WORLD, Vol. IX, footnote to p. 268, states: 'Pericrocotus divaricatus divaricatus (Pericrocotus cinicus) -- Ashy Minivet -- Some consider P. divaricatus a subspecies of P. roseus, but I prefer to treat the two as together comprising a super species.'

As any morsel of information that can enlighten and be helpful to know more about this rare species of Minivets may be useful, I will state my brief observation at Funnel Hill.

On the two occasions I saw the Minivets, I noticed that they move in pairs and in patches of thick forest in the light foliage canopies of trees about 20 feet in height. In spite of the birds being noticed to be moulting the conditions of their flying feathers revealed that they have covered a very long distant flight.

If the Ashy Minivet is considered to be one of the most rare species of the genus for its remarkable change and its coloration with absolute absence of red in the male and yellow in the female, certainly it is not less remarkable in its geographical distribution, for it seems to have abandoned the usual geographical distribution occupied by most of the Minivets careering from north and south China, Indo-Chinese countries, Malay, Burma, Assam, Sikkim, Nepal, and India in general. The geographical area covered by the Ashy Minivet appears to have centred around the Pacific countries -- from Japan, the Philippine Islands, Borneo, Malay and Sumatra in the Indian Ocean. If it enters into the mainland or the Indo-Chinese continent it appears in its migratory flights.

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A PEAHEN NESTS ON A ROOF

By

(Mrs.) Usha Ganguli

On August 25 1964, Mrs. Bani Das Gupta my neighbour reported that a peahen had laid eggs on her roof! I went to see the nest. A wide ledge on her roof with a 15 inch high wall round it was practically covered by the creeper Bignonia venusta and the peahen had laid three large dull white eggs on one side of it. Mrs. Das Gupta told me that the first egg was laid on the 21st evening and the others followed on alternate evenings. She said the hen did not come to the nest at night and left them exposed for long hours during the morning. She covered the eggs from about two in the afternoon and left some time in the evening. While the hen was away, Mrs. Das Gupta covered the eggs every day with a newspaper which the hen removed every afternoon before she sat down to her nest.

A total of five eggs was laid. I do not know when the hen began to incubate properly but once she started to do so she sat very closely leaving the nest only for about fifteen minutes every morning. Mrs. Das Gupta mentioned that every time the hen left the nest she called a loud ghank and was answered by another bird from the Ridge nearby!!

Even when it rained heavily she sat stoically looking quite bedraggled.

Mrs. Das Gupta sometimes threw some rice and green leaves, but the hen did not touch the food which attracted other birds which ate it sitting within a few inches of the hen.

A few days later one egg was discarded by the hen. It had a hole in it.

On September 24th, Mrs. Das Gupta telephoned at about 7.30 a.m. to say that the eggs had hatched early in the morning. I went there immediately and saw that the hen was sitting quietly. Two little chicks were sticking out their heads from under the mother's wing. One by one all four came out. They were quite wobbly, though their legs were well developed. Each was showing the dully whitish egg tooth over the bill. The chicks were pale buff underneath and dull dark brown on top including the back of the neck and the crown. The sides of the face were pale buff. The wings were practically the same dull brown colour as the back with two thin double white bars and black dots inside each double whitish bar. These dropped now and then exposing the buff flanks and the buff sides of the dark back. Each bird had a tiny cone of dark feathers at the back of the head -- just the beginning of the crest. The bill and legs were flesh coloured and the dark eyes had buff rings round them.

After about ten minutes of toddling about they disappeared under the hen who lifted her breast slightly to accommodate them. Then the chicks came out every fifteen minutes or so, walked about 5 to 10 minutes and went under the hen's wings or breast and peeped now and then from under the wings. The hen stood up a little after 9 a.m. Then I saw that she was covering the broken egg shells. She walked on the wall of the ledge, watched, and seemed to listen carefully turning her head in all directions. In twenty minutes she sat down covering the egg shells. She stood up once more an hour later, walked about the ledge for a few minutes then sat a little forward but still covering the egg shells.

Meanwhile the chicks had become quite active in the last three hours. They started taking little jumps and shaking their tiny wings by way of exercise. One of them went up the hen's back. Several times one jumped right over another. On two occasions while three chicks rested under the mother's wings (invisible to me) one chick sat beside the mother with its legs folded under it.

They had started pecking from 8.30 a.m. They pecked the floor; little sticks, leaves of the creeper, the hen's bill and body, anything that they could touch with their bill. Twice I saw the hen tear a few leaves off the creeper and eat them. Once the chicks tried to snatch a leaf from the mother's bill. The hen never once tried to feed them with leaves, insects, or anything. The chicks pecked at everything, but I did not see them eat anything except once when I thought a chick picked up perhaps a tiny insect and ate it. After 11 a.m. a kite swooped on the chicks but they ran under the hen who did not move or try to defend them in any way. By 12 noon the chicks were taking jumps at least two feet in height! One chick jumped on the mother's neck and as she turned her face towards the chick, it started to peck her eye! The chicks were completely silent all the while. The hen called only one -- the deep ghank call. I waited till 1 p.m. and my sister was there till 3 p.m. but the hen did not move much nor did it feed the chicks. She stood up two or three times, walked about for a few minutes but most of the time she sat in the glaring sun, pushing her head occasionally under some overhanging branches of the creeper. She stayed the night on the ledge with the chicks.

I could not visit the hen till 8.30 a.m. the next morning. She was still sitting there but the chicks were not visible. Soon they came out from under the hen's wing. They were very active by now. One of them jumped on to the 15 inch wall of the ledge. I thought it would jump down to the garden below, but it jumped down to join the other chicks on the ledge. Now they were jumping on to the hen's back, tail, and neck, walking a few steps on her back and slipping and sliding down her body. They were pecking vigorously at everything, but no food was there to eat.

I returned by 9.15 a.m. It had started to drizzle by 9.30 a.m. Suddenly I heard the loud call of the peahen -- ghang-gho, ghang-gho. I looked up and saw the hen on another neighbour's roof. I went back immediately and learnt that one chick had jumped down the ledge on to the garden below (about 10-12 ft.) and disappeared among the bushes. At this the mother immediately left the other chicks to look for the chick in the garden. She could not find it and was terribly distracted, walking about on the lawn, going from roof to roof and then on to a tree on the lawn, and back again to the ledge where the rest of the chicks were wandering about. She was completely oblivious of the people who had gathered round the garden, and was calling frequently. After each loud ghang-gho she would call a short soft, kuk kuk, a call I had not heard before. Could this combination of two calls be a special call of despair? Thus it went on -- the frantic search and the loud and soft call of despair. She had lost complete interest in the other chicks. They had ceased to exist for her. Two of the chicks had got entangled in the grape-vine growing over the porch. They were rescued and brought back to the ledge. Now they started making a soft cheep, cheep noise and called almost continuously. Sometimes they walked on the low wall of the ledge. The hen came back to the ledge again and again and the chicks ran under her tail, but she ignored them and walked up and down the wall craning her neck, peering anxiously over the wall for the lost chick. Thrice she absent-mindedly put a foot over a chick while walking and only at the cry of the chick lifted her foot.

She did not seem to recognize them and looked quite demented. Ultimately, by late morning or forenoon she left the garden, never to return.

The chicks were put in a cage. Mrs. Das Gupta fed them on chopped earthworms, chopped spinach, millet and boiled egg. They liked the food and thrived on it. They became greatly attached to her and followed her everywhere. Some weeks later one of them was scalded by boiling water and died. Another was caught between a spring door and one of its wings was badly damaged. This same chick was caught by a mongoose but was rescued in time. At four months age they are now the size of domestic chicken sporting an inch high crest. There is a faint greenish sheen in the neck feathers. The top of the head is dark sooty brown. I am told that they often dance lifting their short tail coverts. They are fed on raw minced meat, millet, spinach. They have a great liking for raddish and Nasturtium leaves from the lawn. They are let out for some time every day. They take sand baths everyday. They peck the walls regularly for lime and will peck everything, shoes, saris, bare toes, anything that they can lay their bill on. I cannot make out their sex, but perhaps both of them are males.

Mrs. Das Gupta told me that she has developed a severe cough lately, and when the chicks are out in the garden, every time that they hear the harrowing cough they run to the veranda and hide under a chair! Perhaps the sound reminds them of the Peahen's kuk, kuk call which was a distress signal.

Last year a peahen laid eggs in another neighbour's garden and when the chicks hatched she lead them to Mrs. Das Gupta's garden where the chicks were chased, and two were caught. The next day I saw the hen for a moment in my garden with a lone chick. She had lost all the others.

In 1962 a peahen had nested under a neem tree (Azadirachta indica) whose base was covered with bushes and wild grass. This tree was on the road in front of Mrs. Das Gupta's house. As soon as these chicks hatched, she flew up the neem tree and began calling ghang-gho, ghang-gho and never came near the chicks. I wonder if it is the same peahen that has been nesting in this neighbourhood for the last three years.

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BIRDS IN A CALCUTTA GARDEN

By

J. N. McKelvie

Soon after my wife and I arrived in Calcutta in early April 1964, we moved into a house in Ballygunge and began to make a record of birds seen in, or flying over, our garden. My earliest record is dated the 11th April and in the period up to 31st July the following 40 species were observed:

Jungle Babbler (Turdoides somervillei), Bluethroated Barbet (Megalaima asiatica), Coppermouth (Megalaima haemacephala), Redvented Bulbul (Pycnonotus cafer), Redwhiskered Bulbul (Pycnonotus jocosus), Little Cormorant (Phalacrocorax niger), Common House Crow (Corvus splendens), Indian Jungle Crow (Corvus macrorhynchos), Pied Crested Cuckoo (Clamator jacobinus), Indian Darter (Anhinga melanogaster), Spotted Dove (Streptopelia chin-

ensis), Black Drong, or King-Crow (Dicrurus adsimilis), Cattle Egret (Bubulcus ibis), Indian Pond Heron, or Paddybird (Ardeola grayii), Whitebreasted Kingfisher (Halcyon smyrnensis), Common Pariah Kite (Milvus migrans), Koel (Eudynamis scolopacea), Bank Myna (Acridotheres ginginianus), Common Myna (Acridotheres tristis), Jungle Myna (Acridotheres fuscus), Pied Myna (Sturnus contra), Blackheaded Oriole (Oriolus xanthornus), Spotted Owlet (Athene brama), Blossomheaded Parakeet (Psittacula cyanocephala), Green Parakeet (Psittacula krameri), Tree Pie (Dendrocitta vagabunda), Blue Rock Pigeon (Columba livia), Magpie Robin (Copsychus saularis), Indian Roller, or Blue Jay (Coracias benghalensis), Brown Shrike (Lanius cristatus), House Sparrow (Passer domesticus), Purple Sunbird (Nectarinia asiatica), Purplerumped Sunbird (Nectarinia zeylonica), Common Swallow (Hirundo rustica), House Swift (Apus affinis), Tailorbird (Orthotomus sutorius), Grey Tit (Parus major), Whitebacked Vulture (Gyps bengalensis), Forest Wagtail (Motacilla indica), Golden-backed Woodpecker (Brachypternus benghalensis).

Most of these 40 species have been resident throughout the summer months and many of them are of relatively frequent occurrence; the migrants include the Forest Wagtail (one record only, on 20th April), the Brown Shrike (seen on half-a-dozen occasions between 12th April and 28th April, but not recorded in May, June, July or August), and the Common Swallow. The cormorants and darters, cattle egrets and paddybirds were seen flying over the garden, usually in the evenings, the first two heading west, the latter generally flying eastwards at that time. My wife and I also saw flights of duck (Whistling Teal?) between the 16th and 21st April and what looked like geese (Nakta?) between the 13th May and 3rd June, in every case at or near sunset, flying east.

Of equal interest to the writer are the birds he has not yet seen in his garden. These include the Green Barbet (Megalaima zeylanica), Golden Oriole (Oriolus oriolus), Common Green Bee-eater (Merops orientalis), Brahminy Myna (Sturnus pagodarum), Neophron (Neophron percnopterus), Nightjar (Caprimulgus asiaticus), Crow-pheasant (Centropus sinensis), Common Hawk-Cuckoo (Hierococcyx varius), Hoopoe (Upupa epops), and the Indian Robin (Saxicoloides fulicata).

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ATTACHMENT TO WINTER QUARTERS IN A BLUE ROCK THRUSH

By

S. S. Saha

Bird Section, Zoological Survey of India, Calcutta 13

The quadrangle enclosed within the main building of the Indian Museum in Calcutta, consists of geometrically patterned stone walks, archaeological statues, flower beds, and residual patches of grass.

Some time in March 1961, one day I noticed an unfamiliar, dark-coloured bird in this quadrangle, perched on the corner of the first floor cornice, from where it dived now and then to the flower beds and grass below to pick up insects. Viewed through field glasses, it looked like the Blue Rock Thrush, which observation was later confirmed when it was identified as Monticola solitarius pandoo. It was seen there every day

till April 1961, after which it was seen no more. However, early in October that year, the bird reappeared at the same place, that is, in the quadrangle of the Museum. On 6 March 1962, it was trapped in a mist net, banded with a red plastic ring round the leg, and released. It stayed in the quadrangle till the end of April 1962. Since then this particular bird with the red plastic ring, has been regularly seen in the Museum building from September/October till following March/April. And, as I write this note, it is still there.

Every day it is seen in the quadrangle from early morning hours till late afternoon when it leaves for its roosting site. In the morning, before the Museum opens to the visitors, it is seen busy feeding in the flower beds and grass. One can, during this time, hear its melodious call also. Later in the day, however, it rests most of the time in some corner of the cornice, once in a while coming down to pick up an insect or flying from one corner to another.

This is the fifth year in succession that the same individual bird has been seen in the same spot every year during September/October to March/April.

Blue Rock Thrush is known to winter in Calcutta area, but so far I have not seen any except the present bird in built-up locations. From this point of view, the present case is of some interest. Furthermore, this case shows that Blue Rock Thrush also returns to the same spot on migration.

REVIEW

CONSERVATION AND YOU. By Allen S. Hitch and Marian Sorensen. pp. 126. D. Van Nostrand Company Inc. Price \$3.50.

This is a beautifully produced and illustrated book which attempts to tell the American citizen in a serious but simple way how his country has been despoiled in the past and what he can do now to make the future safe. It is seldom that the blurb on the cover of a book accurately describes its contents but in this case the blurb is so excellent, that I think the best way to describe the book would be to quote it in full.

"In 1620, it is said, America's virgin forests were so vast that a squirrel could travel through the treetops from the Atlantic Ocean to the Mississippi River without once touching ground. A mere 200 years later man had destroyed forever one third of the mighty forests, stripped away one third of the top soil, turned once lush and fertile valleys into barren lifeless deserts and racked up an incredible toll of mass wildlife slaughter.

"The authors cite vivid historic cases to show how ignorance ... (and greed) has brought ruin and desolation since ancient times (e.g. many Biblical lands, as well as Greece, which were obviously rich and fertile are now barren) and they give warning that today we face grave problems if we are to preserve not only our wildlife and wilderness areas but also the delicate balance of nature on which our own survival depends.

"The coming decade will present a crisis in conservation, showing the effects of today's air and water pollution, manufacturing wastes disposal of radioactive materials and widespread use of dangerous pesticides...."

The book is thoroughly practical and it tells the individual what he can do to conserve the resources of the country. The lesson is something every Indian can usefully take to heart for we

too are busy abusing and despoiling our countryside with both our hands.

L.F.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

Karnala and the Ashy Minivet

Rev. Br. A. Navarro, S.J., whose article appears in this issue, is to be congratulated on his discovery of the Ashy Minivet in Karnala. Those of you who have not visited this area must do so soon for the woodcutter's axe unfortunately is in action, and this lovely evergreen forest may soon lose its basic character. Some months ago Dr. Salim Ali and Mr. Horace Alexander were roughly handled by members of a liquor gang who were obviously afraid that birdwatchers might come across things less innocent than birds during the course of their stroll.

Karnala is pre-eminently suited for being converted into a sanctuary for birds and animals. It is still completely unspoilt. It is a historic spot, and is accessible by road, and it still harbours forms of life which have vanished from neighbouring areas.

The Bombay Natural History Society, the Ornithological Zoo, Dhrangadhra, our own Club, and all others who have the least affection of our countryside must work for this objective. Would some of our more active members suggest a course of action.

CORRESPONDENCE

Newsletter stirs boyhood memories.

I enjoyed reading the December issue of the Newsletter and yet was sad to read Mrs. Usha Ganguli's article about the birds she saw at Ooty. It stirred so many happy boyhood memories and made me thoroughly homesick for dear India.

S. K. Reeves,

18, Eastwick Drive, Gt. Bookham,
Surrey, England

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Birdlife in Delhi.

Although we have no pear trees in our garden, we have a brace of Grey Partridges. Although our garden is in the middle of New Delhi, with much used roads on two sides, the birds seem quite unperturbed by traffic.

We get called, by them, daily between six and half past. And once or twice a week they come and have tea with us in the afternoons between 5 and 6.

On 18th March we had a small teaparty on the lawn. The pair had theirs 35 yards away, taking no notice of us. We had welcome visitors. They did not. Each time a crow swooped down at them, one or the other would make a rocket-assisted V.T.O.L. take-off, 4 to 5 feet high, straight at the intruder. This happened about half a dozen times in as many minutes.

The Skimmers are with us, down on the Jumna, and will soon be nesting. I spent an amusing 15 minutes the other day watching the courting antics of one couple. I recommend them as entertainment to my Delhi colleagues.

W.D.C. Erskine Crum,
New Delhi

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The habit of the Koel.

I heard the koel calling day before yesterday (3 February). It stopped piping exactly on 5th December 1964. This means that summer will be early this year. A peculiar thing that I have been watching for the past two months is that every morning a host of sparrows, a few bulbuls and sometimes a myna come and drink the dew drops on the leaves of my (sic) inspite of it being very cold. They only drink these dew drops and not the water anywhere else. This is peculiar and I wonder if anyone else has noticed this.

A. David,
Delhi

Zafar Futchally
Editor, Newsletter for Birdwatchers
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NEWSLETTER

FOR BIRDPWATCHERS

Volume 5—1965 May



NEWSLETTER
FOR
BIRDWATCHERS

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CONTENTS

A valley in the Orissa jungle. By L.A. Hill	1
Fergusson Hill. By S.V. Nilakanta	4
Birdwatching in the forward areas : The Himalayan Golden Eagle, <u>Aquila chrysaetos hodgsoni</u> Ticehurst. By Capt. J.C. Mahanti	6
A note on the Black Redstart (<u>Phoenicurus ochrurus</u>). By S. K. Reeves	7
Grey Tit roosting in a bamboo stump. By Joseph George ..	8
Notes and Comments	8
Correspondence:	

Diet of a Purple Sunbird. By R.N. Chatterjee (p. 9); Wild Life film show. By Cadet Nandan Nilakanta (p. 9); Little Egret (Egretta garzetta) breeding in Kerala. By K. Nanu Nair (p. 10)

A VALLEY IN THE ORISSA JUNGLE

By

L. A. Hill

It is easier to get down the bank now, from the road to the valley bottom -- a contractor's lorry with a drunken driver recently went over the edge, and a rough track had to be made to pull the vehicle up again. It is only a little valley, named Panposh, densely timbered, running down from the jungly hills; it is not steep-sided where the road crosses it, but 200 yards further down, outcrops of iron ore border the small clear stream. Just above the level ground at the foot of the range, the stream used to cascade down a series of falls in a narrow gorge which was in some places only 10 feet wide but a 100 feet deep, the sides of the gorge being solid iron ore.

There was a little temple in a cave there, and a holy man lived in another cave nearby. Every year, in January, there was a local holiday, and the people used to climb up the gorge and do their pujas in the temple cave, and there would be a fair with singing and dancing and sweetmeat stalls in the flat meadow on the level ground below.

We had to fill the gorge to make a road across for the heavy Euclid dumpers, which carry the iron ore, 27 tons at a time, from the opencast workings to the crushing and screening plant,

and we built a new temple near the village, and holy men came from Puri to consecrate it, and to move the holy relics from the cave in the gorge.

The valley above the gorge is still quiet and peaceful; the modern mechanical sounds of the 6 inch drills and the heavy engines of the shovels and dumpers and bulldozers only just permeate the quiet old-time stillness of the jungle, and the noise of the blasting is quick and loud and sharp and soon forgotten again.

The other day, I walked down the valley to see a little dam we have built a hundred yards above the gorge, from which water is piped to reservoirs above the main haulage road. The water tankers fill up from these reservoirs, and water the road to keep the dust down. The last time I walked down the valley, I slipped on a loose boulder and damaged my binoculars; so I took greater care this time. Some of the trees are huge and grand; wild mangoes and simul and sal -- the majority is sal, -- which thrive in iron ore. The simul flowers have just finished, and the trees are bare, and the wild bee hives stand out black and blotchy -- wild bees seem to like simul trees. The Flame-of-the-forest creepers are brilliant now, and I saw a flock of Grey Mynas in a sal tree covered with this creeper. I stopped to watch them through the glasses and was rewarded by seeing four or five Purplerumped Sunbirds also busy amongst the flowers. As I stood there, I heard the drumming of a woodpecker, followed by the queer strident screeches of the Goldenbacked Woodpeckers as a pair flew to a near-by tree. They looked lovely with the sun shining through the trees onto their golden backs, and the black and white underparts stood out boldly -- the male with its big crest bright red and the female's spotted black and white.

Before I moved on, I noted from that same spot several Crested Tree Swifts fluttering in wide circles uttering their cries which are not unlike those of a minor bird of prey. (I have never managed to have a really good look at one of these swifts, though they are constantly landing on the bare branches of trees); a pair of Large Green Barbets, with their brilliant green backs and thick ugly brown heads; a flock of Blossomheaded Parakeets zig-zagging at speed through the branches, with their sweet plaintive cheeps ringing loud and clear; a blue-black Drongo flashing after flies, with its wings looking ashy coloured in flight; and a Blacknaped Blue Flycatcher. The latter's body is a lovely blue, but the black nape always looks a little incongruous; like a black cap which has slipped.

Walking on down the valley, in the deep dappled shade, and cursing at the eye flies with their annoying habit of hovering just in front of one's eyes or buzzing in a frenzied high-pitched sort of way right inside one's ears, I paid little attention to the Redwhiskered and Redvented Bulbuls, which are so common there, but stopped to watch a flock of a dozen White-eyes, tiny dainty little birds flitting busily hither and thither, and a Greyheaded Flycatcher doing aerobatics. Fantailed Flycatchers are also very common there, and are always a joy to watch, as they flirt about: they have a narrow white stripe under the chin, and white 'eye-brows', and the whole of the underparts is a uniform sooty-brown; I don't know which species they are.

A busy bustling crowd of Jungle Babblers flew on ahead of me-- heavy flapping, awkward looking birds with no colourings to commend them. The single Grey Wagtail that I saw, skipping along the stones in the stream, seemed doubly trim and elegant in comparison.

I spent a good ten minutes watching a flock of Scarlet Minivets. They might be Shortbilled Minivets for all I know but the joy is in the looking, not the exact identification. (Actually, I wish I could identify them!). From underneath, with the light on their bright scarlet underparts and jet black heads, the males are a breath-taking sight; a flock in flight, the scarlet and black of the males and yellow and black of the females, is one of the most brilliant sights of the jungle.

Just before I reached the little dam, I caught a glimpse of a Shama, and later, as I was watching two men clean out the silt-ed mud from behind the wall, I heard the tuneful human whistling notes of a Fairy Blue Bird but didn't actually see it. I have seen them there before on several occasions -- they look black in the shadows but when the sunlight shines on them, they are a joy to behold.

On the way back, I had stopped to watch a Velvetfronted Nuthatch running up and down a tree trunk, when my eye was caught by the movement of a large bird in the undergrowth: it was like a crow-pheasant in shape, and with the same habits of jumping from branch to branch, but smaller. I had, on a previous occasion, caught on unsatisfactory glimpse of what I later thought must have been a Malkoha so I followed this up with care, praying I would get the chance of having a long and careful look. I finally managed to do so, and wrote the following down immediately in my note book:

"V. good view. Dull green-blue back, wings, and tail. Tail graduated with white terminal blobs. Head, neck and chest, grey with large red eye-patch. Long down-curved beak - Malkoha?"

I hurried back to my jeep, paying only a little attention to a couple of Hill Mynas with their loud cheerful note (which is slightly reminiscent of an Oriole's, although to say so is to malign the Oriole), and drove straight home to consult Salim Ali and Whistler. The former does not note the Malkoha in his THE BOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS, but the latter, in the POPULAR HANDBOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS has a description and a black-and-white picture on p. 328. There I read that the Small Greenbilled Malkoha is found in Orissa, and has the bare skin round the eyes 'sky-blue'!! The very similar, but larger, Greenbilled Malkoha has the eye patch crimson . . . but is found in the Central and Eastern Himalayas, Assam, Burma and further east" -- no mention of Orissa! I reckoned I had either made a mistaken identification, or else a name for myself as perhaps one of the first to observe Rhopodytes tristis in this State! I say, "one of the first" as some friends who spent a week in this locality over Christmas had told me previously that they had had a good view of a Malkoha. I therefore went along to see one of them, Mr. J.H. Benthall, last week when in Calcutta, and asked for his views, the main question being, of course, 'red patch or blue patch?'. He and his brother, and their wives, had come across the bird in wooded country (about 6 miles away from my valley, so it obviously was not the same actual bird that I saw) and had watched it for several minutes. They had Whistler's book with them at the time, and so had a good opportunity of comparing the bird in sight with the description in the book. All four were convinced that the skin round the eye was red and not blue.

As far as I am concerned, I shall have to try and have another look for this bird -- which appears to be out of its normal habitat -- and must go and check up once more, in the near future, on our little dam in Panposh Valley!

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FERGUSSON HILL

Poona is blessed with a number of small hills on its outskirts. One of them is Fergusson Hill which overlooks a number of educational institutions, the Deccan Gymkhana and a number of houses with their compounds and orchards. A road passes along one flank of the hill and a cart track branching off from the road along another flank. On the toe of the hill, between the road and the track, are water reservoirs which overflow a little every time the water is pumped into them.

Fergusson Hill can boast of only one small tree growing on one side. Otherwise the hill is barren. Among the outcroppings of rock there is just a little earth for growing some dusty grass. There is always a breeze blowing over the hill.

The foot of the hill presents a busy aspect with hundreds of students cycling at breakneck speed and hundreds of colourful villagers proceeding in noisy groups along the neem-tree border-ed cart track.

However, a walk along the lantana edged paths of the bungalows to the toe of the hill and up the hill, past the water reservoirs, to the very top is most rewarding to a birdwatcher. The whole walk can be done in ten minutes without effort but an average birdwatcher will take an hour and still feel that he has not given enough time for the birds he sees in the mere five hundred metres of a pleasant stroll.

The hedges are full of Tailor birds and Ashy Wren Warblers. Red-vented Bulbuls are frequent visitors to lantana berries. House Sparrows are as common as in any large city but the stonefaced houses lend themselves to accommodate the nests of large numbers of House Swifts. The flowers are a source of delight to sunbirds.

The availability of fruit and berries seems to attract a large number of kools which are easily spotted in spite of somewhat stealthy behaviour. Their larger and more ungainly cousin, the crow-pheasant is a common resident of Poona gardens. Here this bird is not at all shy and probably is very largely responsible for controlling the smaller birds from multiplying. Although the kools must be keeping the crow population in check, I do not know to what extent the crow-pheasant is capable of destroying crows' eggs. Whatever it is, the crows, pigeons, and parakeets are not so overwhelmingly plentiful as in Bombay.

Common mynas as well as brahminy mynas can be seen in numbers jauntily walking around or picking fruit off various bushes. The flashy sight of magpie robins is also guaranteed.

Although golden orioles and ioras are plentiful, attention to them is drawn only when they make their characteristic sounds.

As the foot of Fergusson Hill is approached, the terrain suddenly changes. Here it is grassland with thorny Acacia trees, affording very little cover from view, except for one large banian tree.

Here the magpie robin is replaced by the Common Indian Robin. Once when I disturbed a fierce fight, the bundle of feathers sorted itself out into two young male shamas. This is also the haunt of the Kashmir redstart in winter months. Every now and then a raucous wrangling noise announces a party of jungle babblers flitting from acacia bush to bush.

Here I have seen a pair of the Little Maharatta Woodpeckers,

searching assiduously for insects among the acacia thorns. They were so close that the binoculars could not be focussed. Mynas which want to vary their furit diet with insect fare also seem to find plenty of life in the grass. In this amazing place, I have often seen not less than fifty birds of the same species at a time. The activity of fifty bulbuls or fifty mynas having a feast should be seen to be believed.

Flocks of Whitethroated Munias may be seen rising out of the grass and flying away.

The overflow from the reservoir on Fergusson Hill provides sufficient water for birds to drink and bathe. Bulbuls have been seen to bathe and dry their feathers carefully and come in for a second dip, dry and preen their feathers agin.

Over the road there is a set of telephone wires on which a few drongos and rufousbacked shrikes perch. But the species making the maximum use of this perch is the common bee-eater. Many of the insects which rise out of the grass are quickly nabbed after an aerobatic display. The insects are de-winged before swallowing, the wings gently floating down.

As the climb up the hill is commenced patches of dusty sand are noticeable. The smooth conical pits of 'ant-lions' which trap ants are many. Even though the hill gets progressively barren it seems to support a lot of insect life and therefore a number of skinks and other lizards.

Swallows, crag-martins, and swifts hawk for small insects continuously on the flanks of the hill. This is also the haunt of the blackbellied finch-larks. A great number of these can be seen on the hill. The males are so conspicuous and the females so self-effacing.

A number of pariah kites and scavenger vultures take advantage of the up currents of wind created by the hill and use the same for soaring aloft without effort. Here I have seen a Common Hawk-Cuckoo being chased by a crow and a Shikra-hawk scanning the ground for prey. But for this difference in behaviour, I would have never been able to tell them apart.

Sitting down on the hill and watching, the birds are presented at an all together different angle to the observer. The sun now shines on the birds and brings out all the true colours. It is also easier for our necks and eyes to look slightly downwards. Most birds like bee-eaters and rollers are more brilliant on their dorsal surfaces. Hardly anything can move, in the wide field in front of us, without being spotted. Hoopoes may be seen probing with bills in the College playgrounds.

It is here that I saw the blue rock thrush for the first time. Even as I watched this bird with my glasses it pounced down on a skink and caught it. The skink was bashed on a rock and swallowed.

From here I saw the only kestrel in my life sitting on the only tree on Fergusson Hill. As I approached cautiously, the bird glided down on outspread wings. I ran down the hill to get a closer look and again the bird took off to reach its original perch.

The neem trees on the cart track accommodate about fifty or so bee-eaters. In the evening after much jostling for positions they roost together. They sit in groups of 3 to 8 birds,

huddled together so close as to resemble the compound leages of the neem. At the time of observation the bee-eaters were a very bright green and the neem leaves were an olive drab colour, otherwise the birds would have been totally unnoticed.

The journey down the hill is again equally interesting. Birds which perch on extreme tree-tops like the coppersmiths and white-breasted kingfishers have no advantage over the observer. The hill is taller than any tree.

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BIRDWATCHING IN THE FORWARD AREAS: THE HIMALAYAN
GOLDEN EAGLE, Aquila chrysaetos hodgsoni Ticehurst

By

Capt. J.C. Mahanti

The first time I came to know about this bird was when Indian Air Force introduced it in their Crest. I was not then interested in birdwatching and remembered the name casually. In March 1963 I was sitting with Mr. Prakash Krishan, the then Commissioner of Uttarkhand Division at BIREHI Dak Bungalow and while waiting for the lunch, I was discussing with him the birds he saw in his tour to the interior of Chamoli District. Suddenly he walked out of the verandah and pointing to the sky said 'Look, Golden Eagle here'. The name Golden Eagle created a sensation in me for I have heard a lot about this bird without seeing it. It was flying very high in the sky and was looking almost like a common kite to the naked eye. By the time I borrowed the field glass and focussed them the Golden Eagle had disappeared behind the hills. I felt disappointed, but Mr. Krishan gave me the consolation that these birds were found in abundance beyond 10,000 ft. altitude, and I decided to go trekking one of the following days to see this bird. But work kept me busy and before my plan could materialize I was posted out of that area. The memory of the Golden Eagle remained in my mind.

A few days back, on my arrival in Ladhak Valley I was driving down a hilly road at an altitude of about 12,000 ft., when I saw through the wind shield of my jeep a pair of birds diving down like falcons. In a moment they were on the ground sitting on a big stone about 50 yards from the road. Both of them looked majestic in the bright sunshine of the winter morning against the rocky background slightly covered with snow.

I stopped and went out for a closer view. The prominent chocolate-brown colour with orange-yellow nape and the size left no doubt in my mind that they were Golden Eagles. They sat basking in the sun for quite some time giving me ample opportunity to see them thoroughly. It was a rare piece of luck to see the Golden Eagle on the ground.

Afterwards I saw these birds at altitudes varying from 11,000 and above in the same valley. Though it is a rare species for birdwatchers in the plains, yet it is a common bird here. I have never seen these birds feeding on the ground; as such cannot comment much about their food. But it is quite likely they might feed on chukor, monal, or snow rabbit which are available in plenty in these localities.

These birds build their nests in rock cavities. As the breeding season is approaching, I find them moving in pairs though activities for building nest are yet to commence.

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[The Golden Eagle breeds from central Asia south to the Himalayas as far east as Assam and west to the hills of Baluchistan. Its habitat consists of open alpine forest and tundra from 7000 ft. up. -- Ed.]

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A NOTE ON THE BLACK REDSTART (Phoenicurus ochruros)

By

S. K. Reeves

In the March issue of the Newsletter I attempted to answer Dr. N.W. Cusa's question concerning the Indian Ring Dove, Streptopelia decaocto. Since no one has replied to his question about the Black Redstarts, Phoenicurus ochruros, about Delhi, perhaps I may be permitted to try.

The birds which Dr. Cusa saw about Delhi were, of a surety, Black Redstarts and not Redstarts, Phoenicurus phoenicurus which so delight us in Britain during the summer. Of the occurrence of the Redstart in India, Dillon Ripley confines himself to saying: 'Specimens have been collected in northern Baluchistan and Chitral at 5500 ft.' (SYNOPSIS). As to why the Indian forms of the Black Redstart somewhat resemble in appearance our Redstart, I imagine it is impossible to say. One is, in fact, obliged to seek refuge in that meaningless cliché 'it is just one of those things.'

The form of the Black Redstart which is seen in Britain is gibraltariensis, whereas the two forms seen in India are phoenicuroides and rufiventris. The two Indian forms are, I imagine, very much alike in appearance; rufiventris 'having crown and upper parts less grey-fringed'. The male of the British form is very different in appearance from the Indian forms, being almost entirely smoky black with whitish undertail coverts, a trace of white in the wings and a certain amount of rusty-red in the tail. The hens are more alike, the general colour being brown in the Indian forms and a light smoky brown in the British.

The form which Dr. Cusa saw was almost certainly phoenicuroides, as it is found in winter in the plains, according to Dillon Ripley, north and west of a line from Dwarka, in Saurashtra, to Baroda and thence north-east to Etawah. Rufiventris occupies a more easterly range, being found in winter in north-eastern, central, and southern India. Both Indian forms breed, apart from elsewhere, within Indian limits in the Himalayan chain. It is, perhaps of interest to record that Dillon Ripley says that rufiventris has been seen on passage as high as 20,000 ft. on Mount Everest.

Since the boundary line of the winter quarters of the two Indian forms runs, for part of its length, from Dwarka to Baroda, one looks back nostalgically to the occasions when one saw this lovely, demure, little bird in the compound of our bungalow at Nadiad in the Kaira District and wonders of what form they were: they may well have been of either.

The reader may be interested to know that the suitable habitat which was provided in the form of ruined buildings, caused by enemy bombing in the early part of the last war, was the main cause of the Black Redstart becoming established as a breeding bird in south-east England and particularly London. Since then, of course, it has increased its breeding range in this country and has bred as far north as Yorkshire.

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GREY TIT ROOSTING IN A BAMBOO STUMP

By

Joseph George

Prof. K.K. Neelakantan has recorded in the Newsletter for April 1961 his observations on the use of the recess at the top of bamboo stumps by the Small Green Barbet as a roosting place.

A Grey Tit was observed using a similar roosting site in Dehra Dun in February-March a few years ago. The open end of a bamboo standing about three metres away from the nearest tree was the roost. It was about 6 cm. in diameter and about two metres above the ground.

The bird would arrive on the tree in the evening and call steadily for about five minutes before flying into the hollow in the bamboo. The roosting time was about 40 minutes before sunset in early February, but became only about 25 minutes before sunset a month later. In the mornings the bird left the roost at sunrise.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

Nature Conservation

The Planning Commission, Government of India, called a meeting in Delhi on 23rd April to discuss the question of India's fast dwindling wild life. We believe that this was the first meeting called by the Planning Commission for this purpose. A sub-committee is now considering the administrative details of forming a Wild Life Circle at the Centre as a part of the Ministry of Food & Agriculture, and Wild Life Divisions in the States as a part of the Forest Departments. It was also suggested at the meeting that an ecological survey of the whole country be made to assess the status of various forms of wild life in India.

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Bird picture post cards

The Bombay Natural History Society has brought out a set of twelve coloured post cards of birds. Each set is priced Rs2.50, plus local sales tax -- packing and postage extra where applicable. Readers of our Newsletter will probably find them useful for communicating with their birdwatching friends.

They can be had from the offices of the Society,

Hornbill House
Prince of Wales Museum Compound
Opp. Lion Gate, Apollo St.
Fort, Bombay 1. Telephone, 257277

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THE BOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS, 7th edition

The 7th edition of THE BOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS by Dr. Salim Ali has now been printed and is available at all booksellers in the country. Orders can also be placed direct with the Bombay Natural History Society.

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CORRESPONDENCE

Diet of a Purple Sunbird

One evening in February, Mr. Gibson brought me a wounded Purple Sunbird. Crows had been after it. It seemed that, the bird would not survive. One of its wings was broken. Its legs were injured and the main difficulty was a supply of of nectar from flowers.

However, I placed it inside a small cage and tried to give as much comfort as was possible. Next morning it seemed a little better. I gave it a few flowers but it did not care to look at them. By the evening I was worried and offered it in a small cup a little water mixed with ordinary sugar. To my surprise it leaned over the cup and drank the contents. Next morning I took the bird in the cage and kept it near the flowers. It has a sharp eye for nectar and it leaned against the cage and drank from the flowers which had nectar and did not bother to move when placed near big flowers like asters, whereas it was very happy when near flox and larkspur. I let it out of the cage to see if it could fly or not. The wing was broken and the legs were still not strong enough. After this, I took the bird out on my hand and I had to move from flower to flower. By so doing I saw that it caught a spider in its slender beak. It swallowed it whole. The spider was one of those small green and white ones which are found amongst flowers. My finger was too thick for its thin legs and so I provided a thin twig on which it could sit comfortably. I could now enjoy its acrobatic feats of reaching the nectar or flies. It would pick up small flies, caterpillars, or small moths with ease. At times it licked the outer part of some flowers, I think, it was for salt.

In the house I gave it twice daily the sugar mixture. However it did not have a big place to move about and so no exercise. It was nearly in perfect health for a month. Thereafter, there was something in his manner which showed that all was not well. It took in the usual way its indoor and outdoor meals regularly, but there must have been something lacking in its diet.

Exactly after five weeks of its coming to my care, it died one evening as suddenly as it had come. However, it gave me a good opportunity to know something about its life and character.

R.N. Chatterjee
Natural History Society
Mayo College, Ajmer

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Wild Life of India

Towards the end of January, we had a lecture on the wild life of India by Hari Dang, Esq., a schoolmaster and mountain -eer, who is Editor of Cheetal.

He showed us some interesting films and commented on them. The films were made by E.P. Gee and himself.

Though mainly concerned with animals, the films had some very good scenes of white vultures giving away the location of a tiger's kill and close-ups of Redwattled Lapwings and

Sarus Cranes, which according to Mr. Dang are very good eating, but are afforded religious protection.

In a film made in the Corbett National Park, we saw a Purple Sunbirds and a Grey Hornbill. We also saw numerous peafowl, which Mr. Dang told us are displacing the Red Junglefowl and other species with which they compete for food and living space since they were afforded protection.

The next film was made in the Bharatpur sanctuary, which has over four hundred species of aquatic birds. We had a fascinating close-up view of a Darter feeding its young. The Darter partly digests the food which it then disgorges. Its young put their heads and almost half their bodies down the parents' throat to feed.

Like Vedanthangal, near Madras, this sanctuary has a lake with trees standing in the middle and hundreds of storks, cormorants and Black Ibis roost on them.

We also saw what is probably the first ever successful filming of a Sarus Crane approaching and sitting on its nest. It slowly and superciliously approached its nest and folding its knees like a man squatting, sat down with the eggs under its breast.

The Maharajah of Bharatpur sometimes has guests who are allowed to shoot at this sanctuary, and it is on record that some foreign V.I.P. or other once shot 4000 or 400 (it is probably 400) ducks in one day.

Cadet Nandan Nilakanta
National Defence Academy, Poona

Little Egret (Egretta garzetta) breeding in Kerala

On 21.3.1965 I noticed a Little Egret by the side of a shallow pond near my residence (Malayar) in the company of two Large Egrets, nine Small Egrets, and 36 Pond Herons. The fact that the Little Egret was breeding was evident from its breeding plumage, especially the drooping crest of two narrow plumes.

There is no breeding record of this bird in Travancore-Cochin as per Dr. Salim Ali's BIRDS OF TRAVANCORE AND COCHIN. The area where the bird was seen is definitely outside the territory covered by the above book, but not far away from it. Similarly the season is also said to commence with May, i.e. the start of SW. monsoons. The above observation compares favourably with breeding season recorded in the FAUNA OF BRITISH INDIA, Birds, i.e. March to May or earlier. These birds are said to breed in Ceylon from December to April according to A GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF CEYLON, by G.M. Henry.

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NEWSLETTER

FOR BIRDWATCHERS

Volume 5—1965 June



NEWSLETTER
FOR
BIRDEATCHEES

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CONTENTS

Vultures in the desert. By T.J. Roberts	1
"A Valley in the Orissa Jungle". By S.K. Reeves	4
Interference with a nest site of the Yellow-wattled Lapwing ..By S.D. Jaya -kar and N. Spurway	5
Notes and Comments:	
Birdwatchers' Field Club of Roorkee	6
Report on the activities of Rajkot Birdwatchers' Club during 1964 ...	6
Correspondence:	
The slaughter of Imperial Pigeon in Cherai, Kerala. By K.K. Wilakantan (p. 7); Birds at Kavartti, Laccadive Islands. By E.K. Madhavan (p. 8); 'Little Egret (<u>Egretta garzetta</u>) breeding in Kerala'. By K.K. Wilakantan (p. 8)	

VULTURES IN THE DESERT

By

Mr. T.J. Roberts

I so much enjoyed reading Mr. Stuart Melliush's notes from Madras in the March bulletin of the Newsletter, that I am stimulated to attempt a brief account of an interesting morning spent on March 10th of this year. The comprehensive series of notes by my friends Messrs. D.A. Holmes and J.O. Wright on the birds observed around Sukkur, in Northern Sind, has already demonstrated that there are keen bird watchers up in the dry North West, but I hope that this note will also help to show the diversity of conditions which can be encountered on this sub-continent.

My account relates to the desert area known as Cholistan which borders Bahawalpur division (Formerly State) in West Pakistan, along its South Eastern boundary. Cholistan is in fact the beginning of the Great Indian Desert which stretches through Jaisalmer and Bikaner. In contrast to the ochreous greys and dull browns of the alluvial plain, Cholistan presents a heat shimmering vista of succeeding range upon range of golden yellow sandhills, interspersed with shallow flat areas of hard baked saline ground known as 'Pats'. These 'Pats' are studded with tamarisk bushes, whilst even the twenty foot high dunes are dotted with bushes of Kandi (*Prosopis spicigera*), Wild Caper (*Caparis aphylla*) and *Salvadora* species.

On this occasion I was inspecting some agricultural land right inside the fringes of this desert. Though a four-wheel drive Jeep was the only means by which I had been able to reach the area, on the following day I determined to borrow a riding camel, with the intention of being better able to observe the bird life as well as the crops. In such country, well trained riding camels are readily available, and I had the choice of four equally comfortable mounts. Apart from the lack of concern shown by most birds when approached by a ridden camel, and the lofty vantage point secured by the rider, I can honestly recommend this mode of bird watching. A well trained camel will stand perfectly steadily, which is essential to anyone trying to observe through binoculars. In my experience, even the slight vibration from the idling engine of a stationary Jeep, or the more exasperating slight swaying of an elephant's howdah, make steady observation difficult if not impossible.

Before entering the sand-hill barrier to the true desert, I passed a small Jheel formed by waterlogging of a low lying area. Such conditions may seem paradoxical, but canal irrigation has brought widespread problems of waterlogging even in such arid areas. This Jheel was perhaps five acres in all, brackish shallow water with the embankments of former cultivated fields still visible above the water, and clumps of Tamarisk scrub growing on the fringes. Here I watched the fluting courtship display of two pairs of Little Ringed Plovers. This is one of the few winter visitors to this area, which actually starts courtship display even before its short migration north to its breeding grounds on the Indus. Two of the birds had the really startling "spectacles" (Orbicular ring) of chrome yellow, which emphasised the comparatively large size of their eyes, and indicated that all four birds were probably of the race *Charadrius dubius jerdoni*, which in my own limited observation in the region, is less frequently encountered than *C. d. curonius* in the winter. There were several green sandpipers (*TRINGA OCHROPUS*) which seem able to find even the remotest and isolated patches of water and mud. Also two diminutive Temminck's stints (*Calidris temminckii*) showing well their paler olive green legs which I have found helpful in distinguishing them from little Stints. They were no bigger than the pair of white headed Wagtails (*MOTACILLA ALBA*) feeding alongside. Finally there was a solitary black winged Stilt (*HIMANTOPUS HIMANTOPUS*) and a group of Reeves (*PHILOMACHUS PUGNAX*) in winter plumage. The latter showed considerable variation their leg colour, from yellow to greenish brown, and when twice put to flight by my too close approach, the two conspicuous white crescents of their upper tail coverts showed clearly. They were quite silent in flight unlike so many allied waders, and also apparently were reluctant to leave this small patch of water whereas the Stilt departed entirely. I was reluctant to leave this water myself, but was about to return to my waiting camel when about two hundred yards away I just glimpsed the slender form of a Harrier as it dropped down out of sight in the Tamarisk bushes. A round about approach and rather wet feet (I was shod for desert not mud), rewarded me with the wonderful sight of a young male MONTAGUE'S HARRIER (*CIRCUS PYGARGUS*), which was actually running in ungainly fashion through the water in short frog hunting sallies. Perhaps the smallest and most graceful of the Harriers in flight, it still looks a fierce and large bird on the ground. Comparatively long yellow Tarsi are topped by bushy well feathered thighs. The toothed upper mandible is strongly down curved and the deep set eyes are framed in whitish buff. But the most striking thing was its bright rufous orange throat, breast and flanks topped by dark brown crown, back and wings. Its conspicuous white rump and long narrow tail with three dark cross bars were latter revealed in flight and I noticed that the lower part of its dark brown ear coverts were encircled with the same tawny colour as its breast and framed with two dark brown crescentic collars which pattern was conspicuous even when in flight and gave it rather a spectacled or owl-like appearance when viewed full face. After this I had to cross a stretch of some two miles of pure desert and in one of the 'pats' my eye was attracted to the pathetic sight of a three-quarter grown sheep lying on its side. From its feeble attempts to rise and join the flock which we had ridden past half a mile previously, it was obviously "in extremis". It was not until about two hours later that I was returning along more or less the same track when I realised that in all that empty waste, the lamb had attracted the ever watchful vultures. There were some fifteen birds wheeling high overhead and more coming into view. I stopped and watched the circling birds and was intrigued to realise that apart from two or three white backed

vultures (GYPS BENGALENSIS), which is usually the only species seen in the cultivated areas of Bahawalpur, there were also eight or nine slightly larger birds with pale Khaki bodies which were Griffon vultures (GYPS FULVUS). The White Backed, from underneath is easily recognised by its blackish grey body contrasting with whitish axillaries and dark grey remiges. By contrast the Griffons even to the naked eye, showed clearly a dirty yellowish brown body and axillaries almost of the same colour, with only the primary and secondary pinions a dark grey colour. The Griffon though uncommon here, seems to be a highly gregarious species whenever it finds a carcass, and I was surprised to see so many birds as I believe these cliff nesters also roost communally and prefer the inaccessible crags of the SULEIMAN hills across the Indus river and some fifty miles away by direct line. Could it be that these huge birds travel as much as 100 to 120 miles daily between their nightly roosts and food hunting surveys? I think this is probable, since I have never come across the communal roost of any Griffon vultures in any trees lining a canal, such as are favoured by the equally gregarious White Backed vultures in this area, and a good number of which are conspicuous enough to attract notice.

I then noticed one much darker almost black vulture a bit apart from the other circling birds. Being at a different height it was difficult to assess the relative size of this blackish vulture, neither could I discern any white thigh patches, so could not be certain whether it was the smaller King Vulture (SARCOGYPS CALVUS) or Cinerous Vulture (AEGYPTIUS MONACHUS). No sooner had the numbers increased to about twenty when I realised that they were spiralling upwards in ever rising circles. I watched fascinated as within the space of what seemed like a few minutes, and even in the lenses of my powerful binoculars, the entire group, except for 5 or 6 birds which drifted off sideways, disappeared quite literally into the sky above me. How far can these amazing birds see and how high do they normally fly when hunting? For every occasional vulture seen over head, are there many more invisible specks more than a mile above? A bird with a five or six feet wing span is not easily lost to view and I had not appreciated before, at what immensely high altitudes these vultures must often fly. I then surmised that the birds in the air had either seen that the lamb was alive and recovered or perhaps some stray dogs had taken possession of the carcass. Anyway, they were discerning enough to realise without coming closer than about five hundred yards, that there were no prospects of a meal there. I therefore asked my camel driver to try and find the lamb again. In such featureless tamarisk scrub this was not easy and we practically blundered onto it when two huge Griffon vultures took to the air just in front of us. Viewed close up, their bodies were a dirty pale chestnut rather than the creamy white they had appeared from a distance. The breast feathers appeared to have pale shafts giving the body a streaked appearance and in one I could see that the bill looked a polished black with the cere of the same colour. As they banked in flight I could also see clearly the pale golden yellow ruff of lanceolate feathers at the junction of the neck and the mantle. Then I caught a movement behind a bush not twenty yards distant, and my astonished eye finally made out the form of a truly gigantic bird. In the company of one Neophron (NEOPHRON PERCNOPTERUS), and two immature White Backed vultures, there stood fully three and a half feet tall and twice as big as the latter, a Cinerous vulture. It was obvious that the other vultures kept a respectful distance from this monarch. A faded dirty chocolate brown, its hunched back showed a comparatively short tail almost covered by the secondary wing feathers. I could see the sun glinting on every vain in its huge scapular feathers. The head was feathered with short dark hackles (not down) right up to the occiput. Only its crown, cheeks and upper throat were bald of feathers. This naked area was a scabrous white tinged with pink. The enormous eye with dark brown iris was deep set and surrounded by a rim of dark brown feathers which emphasized its size. But the most striking feature was his very deep compressed and heavy black bill with a pale livid mauve cere. After fully five minutes of such intimate inspection, the little group decided that we were really too close, and all took to the wing. A few strips of scattered wool indicated that four or five birds had been between them, just consumed some twenty pounds of meat and bone, and probably the Cinerous vulture had devoured a major share of this. But such a light snack was no hinderance to flight I was amazed to see. A few swift running steps, and the spreading of those vast pinions, were enough to lift the Cinerous vulture effortlessly into the air. Though a nine foot wing span and fifteen and a half pounds weight have been

recorded for this species, I had no conception before of the size which GYPS MONACHUS can attain.

Aesthetically, the vultures are inclined to disgust and repel further study, but there are certainly many aspects of their wonderful adaption to their peculiar diet, which need to be further studied. Capable of gorging themselves with almost incredible speed when food is available, how long can they fast, and for how many successive days must they occasionally be obliged to patrol the skies without finding any suitable feast? How many years elapse before they attain adult plumage and is their moult a continuous and very gradual process throughout life (as in the case of some of the great eagles), so that their quest through the skies, so essential to survival, can be maintained uninterrupted? Why is the communal instinct so well developed in Gyps Fulvus and G. Bengalensis whilst not at all in G. Monachus?

Perhaps some readers of the News letter already know the answers to these intriguing questions.

'A VALLEY IN THE ORISSA JUNGLE'

By

S.K. Reeves

I very much enjoyed Mr. Hill's article in the May issue of the Newsletter about the birds he saw, and so obviously enjoyed watching, in a valley in the Orissa jungle. May I say how well he succeeded in communicating his pleasure to others and how many vicarious thrills I, for one, was afforded.

May I be permitted to attempt to be of some assistance to him with some of the problems of identification with which he was presented.

He seems to have formed the opinion, based solely on the distribution given in Whistler's POPULAR HANDBOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS that the Large Greenbilled Malkoha (Rhopodytes tristis) is very unlikely to occur in Orissa. I cannot speak from personal experience, but it seems to me that this is not nearly so unlikely as he imagines, for Dillon Ripley in A SYNOPSIS OF THE BIRDS OF INDIA AND PAKISTAN (p. 181) says that it is found as far south of the Himalayas as Bihar, Chota Nagpur and the Northern Circars. Stuart Baker in the FAUNA OF BRITISH INDIA, Birds (2nd ed., vol. IV, p. 178) is not quite so definite, and says that it occurs in Bengal and possibly Chota Nagpur and the Northern Circars.

As to the Fantail Flycatcher which Mr. Hill saw, and was unable to identify, there is no doubt from his description that it belongs to the genus Rhipidura, and is, therefore, a close congener of the Whitebrowed Fantail Flycatcher Rhipidura aureola and the Whitespotted Fantail Flycatcher Rhipidura albogularis. The key to the species of the this genus given in the FAUNA OF BRITISH INDIA, Birds (2nd ed., Vol. II, p. 276) makes it quite clear that since this bird had dark underparts and did not have a white forehead it can be none other than the Whitethroated Fantail Flycatcher (Rhipidura albicollis). He will find the bird fully described and illustrated in colour in Salim Ali's INDIAN HILL BIRDS, p. 88 and Plate 33, No. 5. He will observe, incidentally that the narrow white stripe under the chin, is, in fact, a white half collar.

Interference with a nest site of the yellow-wattled lapwing

by S.D. Jayakar and H. Spurway
Genetics and Biometry Laboratory
Government of Orissa
Bhubaneswar - 3
Orissa, India.

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Once again we appeal to bird-watchers for information on behaviour that we have observed in the yellow-wattled lapwing.

A pair which is nesting in and around our garden this year - and we have reason to believe it is the same pair that nested in this territory last year (see Newsletter, August and September '64) - had all the eggs in their first nest in our garden eaten by a rat-snake on March 16, and the one egg found on 25/3 in their second nest also destroyed on 27/3. On 29/3 we found the first egg in their third nest in the garden of our neighbour Shri S.K. Ghose. Only two eggs were laid (the other also on 29/3) in this nest, as compared with the usual 4 of a plover's nest. Perhaps these eggs and the previous 1 together constituted one clutch physiologically. We of-course inspected this nest more or less regularly, and on 18/4 we were surprised to see that the eggs had been removed from their pebbly scrape and were now lying 70 cm. north of their original site at the bottom of a pit about 4 cm. deep, made by removing a half-buried stone. After some questioning, the mali admitted that he and another servant had feared for the safety of the nest, and had moved it to a "safer" location. We were extremely worried as to whether the parents would desert the eggs, but the same evening, one bird was seen flying away from it as we approached it with a battery torch.

The parents gradually filled the pit up with pebbles, and on April 26, frantic screaming announced to us that at least one egg had hatched. On going to the nest, we discovered to our horror that the same mali had again tried to be helpful. As he had seen the two chicks running in and out of the nest, and as there was a dog near it, he had emptied the pit of pebbles, and surrounded it with big stones to protect the chicks. We removed the stones and filled the pit up again and both chicks next day left the garden with their parents. They are both still alive today (18/5).

Have any of our readers any records of ground nesting birds, accepting a small displacement of their eggs?

CORAL BLOSSOM SIPPING

We are lucky enough to live on a hill over-looking Gauhati and on its outskirts. We have always felt that birds look upon our garden as an "airport", and my monthly lists of birds seen in it amount to an average of 36 species, reaching nearer the record of 52 during migration or when we have a special feast to offer! The greatest source of attraction during the cold weather is ERYTHRINA INDICA. Many of these trees grow in our vicinity, and at any time during January, February and early March swarm with enthusiastic sippers! During the first few weeks, when one tree always seems to flower well ahead of the others, Hair crested Drongos firmly keep the nectar to themselves, and fill the air with their clear calls and peculiar gobbling sounds. As the feast becomes more widespread, Black Drongos join in, with the inevitable Red vented, Red whiskered and Black capped Yellow Bulbuls, Common, Jungle, Pied and Grey headed Mynahs, Blue throated Barbets, Black headed Orioles, Rose ringed Parakeets, Tree-pies, Gold fronted Chloropsos, and Purple Sunbirds. To my astonishment, I have even seen a Yellow-naped Woodpecker sipping, and a Grey Tit tearing the petals destructively to bits! The trees become a riot of gay flowers and busy, happy birds!

After a good session of sipping, Hair crested Drongos and Red vented Bulbus particularly seem prone to fluttering up to one another for a little gentle dalliance! Last March I was most amused by some bulbuls, many of whom were perched among the blossoms in pairs, affectionately "billing". One was actually lying over the flowers, wings outstretched and quivering, feathers fluffed out. I wondered if perhaps it was asking for a little more than "billing", when another bulbul flew beside it and proceeded to peck at its back! There were no further developments, and eventually the flock flew away. Mr. E.P. Gee, when I described the incident to him, suggested that our bulbul was asking for help in controlling ants! These blossoms must surely attract as many insects as they do birds, and be picked up by sippers!

A few days later a Tree-pie, having enjoyed some nectar, moved down a branch and proceeded to tear at the bark, eventually stripping enough to expose and apparently eat some of the pith! We only witnessed this on one occasion, but I find that our trees still have their attraction - to Rose ringed Parakeets, who fly in most days to eat the seeds!

I can think of no better trees than these to recommend to bird watchers with space in their gardens. Small branches can be planted in the monsoon, and anyway in Assam, strike readily and seem to resist the onslaught of white ants. The cuttings soon grow, and in no time you will experience some of the amusement and interest these trees have given me while I have lived in this lovely part of the world.

- Mrs. Maureen Thom.

NOTES AND COMMENTS:

Birdwatchers' Field Club of Roorkee

Shri Haridutt Vedalankar, author of Kalidas ke Pakshi, addressed the members of the Club on 17th April, 1965 at the Central Building Research Institute, Roorkee. The subject of the talk was "Kalidasa as a Birdwatcher".

The speaker said that the poems and plays of Kalidasa contain references to 22 species of birds. He considered in detail Kalidasa's references to the Koel, the Common Hawk-Cuckoo and the Pied Crested Cuckoo. Kalidasa recognized the koo call of the Koel as that of the male bird and described it more as a koojan than as a song. The nest ~~para~~ habits of the Koel was well known to Kalidasa. A very significant observation made by the Poet in regard to the Pied Crested Cuckoo is that the bird spreads out northward from Central India towards the Himalayas with the advancing clouds.

Joseph George

Central Building Research Institute
ROORKEE.

Report on the activities of
Rajkot Birdwatchers' Club
during 1964.

Ours is a very small group indeed. But what we lack in numbers, we make up by our enthusiasm. We welcome every opportunity to go out birdwatching. During 1964, we had more than 25 outings near Rajkot.

Our Annual General Meeting was held in Rajkumar College on 19.4.1964. Many topics of interest were discussed. K.S. Iavkumar and Ialsinh M. Raol were again unanimously elected as the President and the Secretary respectively.

Two of our young and very enthusiastic members made a discovery of the Golden Oriole in Rajkot during 1964 (refer 'Newsletter' for October 1964).

As in 1963, the general public was informed about the presence of Flamingoes in Rajkot through a notice in the daily newspapers. For persons interested, our club had arranged for the observation of those birds and other water birds with the help of fieldglasses on Ialpari Lake on 21.6.1964. Nearly 30 persons turned up and availed themselves of the opportunity of seeing and admiring the flamingoes.

A place of big congregation of Sarus Cranes (about 150 in numbers) was sighted by a member in May 1964. Some of our members paid frequent visits to that place. It was really a sight to see so many of our biggest birds at one place (viz. the reservoir of Aji Dam, Rajkot). Again the general public was informed about this by a press notice in the three daily newspapers.

Through the good offices of one of our members, Shri. B.M. Shukla, Chief Agent, The Bank of Baroda, Rajkot, one show of the film "Our Feathered Friends" was arranged on 11.8.1964. Members were really pleased to witness it.

Shri K.P. Jadav, a member of our Club, has drawn more than 300 pictures of the birds of Saurashtra, Gujarat and Cutch in life size in line and black and white. These were exhibited under the auspices of Dharmendra Sinhji College, Rajkot for four days from 23.12.1964.

Under the able guidance of K.S. Iavkumar, the Rajkot Birdwatchers' Club slowly but steadily marches on.

Ialsinh M. Raol

Secretary.

CORRESPONDENCE

THE SLAUGHTER OF IMPERIAL PIGEONS IN CHORAI, KERALA

Ever since I read, some 25 years ago, H.R. Baker's long notes on the Imperial Pigeons (*Ducula badia cubra* and *D. aenea pusilla*) in his book THE BIRDS OF SOUTHERN INDIA, I have been making enquiries about the swamp in the neighbourhood of Cannanore where Jerdon found 'large' numbers of these pigeons eating 'the buds of *Avicennia* and other shrubs and plants that affect salt and brackish swamps.' Though Whistler states in the Vernay Survey Report (*J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc.* 38:674) that the swamp seems to have disappeared, I gathered that there are large marshy areas near Kakkad, close to Cannanore. I have not so far had a chance to visit the place and gather information about the pigeons.

Recently, however, at a meeting of the State Wild Life Board, the Chief Conservator of Forests referred to the terrible slaughter of the Imperial Pigeon by the people of Chorai, a place on the coast very near Ernakulam. Mr. Raghavan, a member of the Board, was able to give me more details as he himself had once been an insatiable killer of these birds. He told me that the dull-coloured Jerdon's Imperial Pigeon suddenly appears in very large numbers in Chorai some time in May and leaves the place only in July. During its stay in Chorai it frequents the salt-water swamps, 'drinking the honey of a marsh plant called 'chulli' and then slaking its thirst by going to the edge of the backwaters and drinking the salt water.' After this the birds fly to the nearest large trees and Jerdon says they are then 'like persons who have drunk much and are indifferent to what is going on around them. The flight of the pigeons to the trees is a signal for everyone who has guns to make a bee-line for the trees and to blaze away. It seems that

that the slaughter is terrible and that the hunters are like men possessed until the last pigeons have departed in July.

I hope to be able to go to this place and gather more facts. But, in the meantime, should not an attempt be made to restrict the number of birds killed? As the passing of a law restricting the number of birds each hunter can kill in a season will be of no avail (enforcement being impossible as things are today), I should welcome any practical suggestions readers of the Newsletter may offer.

K.K. Moollakuntan
TRIVANDRUM, Kerala
23.5.1965

BIRDS AT KAVARTTI, LACCADIVE ISLANDS

Perhaps this card from one of your members from this isolated part of the Laccadives might be of interest. The birds are found all the year round here. Turnstones, Sandpipers, Reef Terns, and Grey Plovers appear during the cold season. Terns are found in tanks and land-locked waters. There are no crows on this island, though there are plenty on the others. They are great pests. There are hundreds of White-eyes and it is a pleasure to watch a troupe of them hunting for grubs among the leaves of trees. They nest during the rains and sing a pretty little song in the evenings from their roosts.

A few grey herons build nests on the palms. There were Marsh Warblers here during November last year.

B.K. Madhavan
S.O.P. Kavartti, Laccadives, 30.1.1965

'LITTLE EGRET (EGRETTA CARRUTTA) BREEDING IN KERALA'

Reference the note from Mr. Manu Vair, May 1965 issue of the Newsletter.

The title of the piece is misleading. The presence of birds in breeding plumage is not evidence of breeding in the locality where they are found, especially when they happen to be birds capable of long and sustained flight. Malabar is on the Kerala-Madras border and there is every possibility of the egrets building nests miles away from Malabar, in Madras State. I have records of Little Egrets with nuchal crests dated from 1943, but so far I have not heard of any place in Kerala where these birds nest. Similarly, just when the monsoon breaks, one comes across large numbers of Cattle Egrets in various phases of breeding plumage, in Palghat District, Alwaye and Trivandrum; but the only place where I have seen nests is Kunissery in Alatur Taluk, Palghat Dist. This was more than 20 years ago.

K.K. Moollakuntan
Trivandrum, Kerala
22 May 1965

Zafar Futehally
Editor, Newsletter for Birdwatchers
32A, Juhu Lane, Andheri, Bombay 58-AS

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666

CONTENTS

More about the birds of Thekkady. By K.K. Neelakantan	1
Birds of Rajasthan. By Zafar Futehally	4
Australia's Lyrebirds. By Courtesy of the Australian High Commission, New Delhi	5
Whitecollared Kingfisher, <u>Halcyon chloris</u> . By Mr. J.W. McKelvie ...	7
Review:	
SOME INDIAN WEAVER BIRDS. (L.F.)	7
Notes and Comments	8
Correspondence:	
'Little Egret (<u>Egretta garzetta</u>) breeding in Kerala'. By K.K. Neela- kantan (p.8); Birdwatching near a solitary tree. Major A. David (p. 8); Bengal Florican in the Kaziranga Sanctuary. By Mrs. Maureen Thom (p. 9)	

MORE ABOUT THE BIRDS OF THEKKADY

By

K.K. Neelakantan

The attractiveness, to the bird-watcher, of the Thekkady Wild Life Sanctuary has been stressed by earlier contributors, particularly by Mrs. Usha Ganguly (NEWSLETTER, October-1964) and Dr. Miss Mani (N.L. for February-1965). Unfortunately this wonderful place is about to lose a great deal of its charm because of 'developmental activities' such as providing living quarters for the staff and additional amenities for the tourist. As has been pointed out in the earlier notes, the only place where one can see birds to one's heart's content is the patch of forest lying between the Aranya Nivas Hotel and the approach to the Sanctuary. This area was, till recently, carefully preserved to retain, to the fullest extent possible in the circumstances, the very "feel" of the forest. The buildings put up were so situated that they did not obtrude. The short walk from the II Class Tourist Home to Aranya Nivas was, but for the tarred road and the neat labels on the trees, a stroll through virgin forest. Flocks of Grackles, Yellowbrowed Bulbuls, scattered pairs or parties of Racket-tailed Drongos, Green Parbets and Malabar Grey Hornbills filled the place with appropriate sounds. The presence as well as the voices of parties of the Black Langur and the numerous Giant Squirrels that

disported fearlessly in the branches above one's head could give the lonely stroller a greater thrill than all the elephants seen from a cruising motor boat!

This state of affairs is fast changing. I was at Thekkady on a brief visit at the end of April (1965), and was disheartened to see that a number of forest giants had been felled to provide room for a long line of buildings. The plan seems to be to convert the Aranya Nivas area into a 'township' so that the tourist would feel quite at home when on his few hours' dash through the Sanctuary. One naturally wonders whether the wishes of the right type of tourist have been consulted before deciding that these 'amenities' were urgently required.

Anyone who has been to Thekkady will know that it is only when walking through the woods between Aranya Nivas and the entrance to the Sanctuary that one is really conscious of the forest. The vaunted boat-trip on the lake is hardly more exciting than a visit to the zoo. It wouldn't surprise me if, as a result of the conversion of this place into a township, the number of visitors was considerably reduced. I hope that before it is too late, the idea of developing the neighbourhood of Aranya Nivas into a township will be given up. If the influx of tourists demands the provision of such a township, it could be sited just outside the Sanctuary area, on the Kumili-Thekkady road. Transport to the boat jetty could be provided by the administration or some private company.

* * * * *

I reached Thekkady at 5 P.M. on the 28th and left at 10 A.M. on the 30th. Bad weather and other factors were a serious handicap to bird-watching, and I had to be content with casual observations. Also, I was more keen on adding the Rufous Woodpecker at least to my Lifelist than on making a note of all birds seen etc.

Though I did not see any Rufous Woodpecker, I drew some consolation prizes. The first of these was the curill I had when, hoping against hope, I looked up into the giant bombax tree close to the boat jetty and found a large nest with three Whitenecked Storks in it. To be precise, only two birds were in the nest. The third stood a few feet away from the nest, on the same branch, as though it had been sent to Coventry. I visited the nest thrice, and passed under it on two other occasions, but every time three identical-looking, full-grown birds were seen there. The only other Whitenecked Stork seen was an adult which stood on top of a tall stump in the lake some two furlongs away from the nest-tree. Mr. Parameswaran, one of the Asst. Wild Life Preservation Officers, told me that there were seven adult Whitenecked Storks in the Sanctuary though this was the only nest known to him. It appears that the Storks nest in this bombax tree year after year though last year for some inexplicable reason they failed to do so.

Incidentally, Parameswaran has taken great pains to familiarise himself with the local birds, and he should prove of immense help to any bird-watcher who visits Thekkady.

On the 30th, at about 7.30 A.M., the two birds in the nest were seen spreading their wings and leaping vertically over and over again, obviously as a preliminary to leaving the nest.

Darters are said to be breeding in certain less frequented parts of the lake. The few Darters I saw were all adults.

The only birds which were clearly breeding were Jungle and Whiteheaded Mynas. The former had numerous nests all of which seemed to hold clamorous young. Two pairs of the Whiteheaded species were seen entering holes in dead stumps in the lake.

Last year, early in April, I found most Racket-tailed Drongos with only one streamer; this year, however, every Racket-Tailed Drongo seen had both streamers in excellent condition. Last April I failed to see the Crimsonthroated Barbet; this year it was one of the first birds to be seen well. But, judging from the calls, there seemed to be only one pair of these birds here.

Given below is a complete list of the birds noted on this visit:-

1. Jungle Crow.
2. Southern Tree Pie. Not seen by me last April; this year conspicuous.
3. Yellowchecked Tit. Only twice, and at one place alone.
4. Velvetfronted Nuthatch. Parties.
5. Jungle Babbler.
6. Scimitar Babbler. Only heard.
7. Yellowbrowed Bulbul. Number surprisingly small.
8. Redwhiskered Bulbul.
9. Pied Bushchat. On the Vandiperiyar-Pamba road.
10. Blackbird. Only one seen.
11. Whistling Thrush. Noisy in the morning. Pairs in trenches.
12. Blacknaped Flycatcher. Pamba road.
13. Brown Shrike. Seen here and there, all over the place.
14. Malabar Woodshrike. Only in mixed hunting parties.
15. Orange Minivet. Pairs as well as parties.
16. Ashy Swallow-Shrike. Number very small. Last April one per dead tree!
17. Bronzed Drongo(?) 2 or 3 in the company of Racket-tailed Drongos; tiny, and uttering various loud, melodious notes. Could only have been Bronzed Drongos.
18. Racket-tailed Drongo.
19. Southern Grackle.
20. Whiteheaded (Blyth's) Myna. No Greyheaded Myna seen.
21. Jungle Myna. Busy feeding young in nest.
22. House Sparrow. Vandiperiyar only.
23. Pied Wagtail. Lake, near Dam. No Grey Wagtail seen.
24. Pipit. 2 pairs near water (Sp?)
25. Small Yellownaped Woodpecker. 1 pair only.
26. Malabar Goldenbacked Woodpecker. Often.
27. Threetoed " " "
28. Malherbe's " " "
29. Small Green Barbet.
30. Crimsonthroated Barbet.
31. Hawk Cuckoo. Heard.
32. Southern Crow-Pheasant.
33. Bluewinged Parrakeet. No Blossomheaded seen!
34. Lorikeet.
35. Chestnutheaded Bee-eater. Pamba road.
36. Pied Kingfisher. Lake, near Dam.
37. Common Kingfisher(?). One only, Lake.
38. Whitebreasted Kingfisher.
39. Great Hornbill. Pamba road. One bird only, but excellent close view of bird in flight from above!
40. Indian Roller.
41. Malabar Grey Hornbill.
42. Nightjar (sp?). One 'large', silent nightjar hawking insects over leaf canopy near Aranya Nivas at about 6.30 P.M.
43. Jungle Owlet. Seen, not heard.
44. Vulture (Whitebacked?). One far off.
45. Brahminy Kite. One, adult, close to Aranya Nivas.
46. Blackwinged Kite. Pamba road.
47. Crested Honey Buzzard(?). A dark grey, bird of prey with a naked-looking, small, ash-grey head and neck, and full, rounded tail barred.
48. Jerdon's Imperial Pigeon. Pairs. Common.
49. Spotted Dove(?). Volplaning at edge of forest.
50. Grey Jungle Fowl. Heard.
51. Common Sandpiper. Singly at three places.
52. Darter.
53. Whitenecked Stork.

54. Grey Heron. One bird only.
 55. Little Egret. Small number.
 56. Pond Heron. Beginning to assume breeding plumage.

* * * * *

BIRDS OF RAJASTHAN

By

Zafar Futehally.

On the 19th December 1963 we arrived by car at the lake-studded, hill-girded city of Udaipur. The view of Fateh Sagar Lake from the Anand Bhavan circuit house was even more splendid than one had expected. The marshy edge of the lake, and the hills coming down on the west to the water's edge suggested that it would be a good place for birds. I did not know how good it would be until I went for a walk there in the evening.

The hotel garden itself contained a variety of birds. A neem tree was swarming with White-eyes. The birds hung on to the trees in all sorts of acrobatic positions, and no insect however much it wanted to survive could have escaped the efficient inspection of these birds. These White-eyes kept up a sweet soft chorus the whole time. On a telegraph pole some distance away there was a bird of prey. In the very strong afternoon light it was difficult to make out the colours, but from the general shape it looked like a White-eyed Buzzard. It had yellow legs all right, though I could not see the white eye. But few other diurnal birds sit so patiently for food to appear within hopping distance. Overhead a King Vulture was circling its white thigh patches clearly visible against a blue sky. There were two birds of prey with broad wings showing black and white bands from underneath. They looked like buzzards, but I would not like to hazard a guess of the species. There were a large number of scavenger vultures, circling overhead with kites, and whitebacked vultures. A loud raucous voice announced the presence of the Tree-pie on a dimru tree. A Yellowcheeked Tit was intent like the White-eyes on scouring every nook and corner of the tree for insects.

In the evening we strolled along the bund on the west of Fateh Sagar Lake, and the quantity of bird life was quite startling. There were a large number of large Pied Wagtails looking very attractive in their neat black and white tunics. Their calls had a slightly more musical quality than twitterings of most wagtails. These birds are found in West Pakistan and India. Grey Partridges could be heard frequently calling from the scrub-covered hillsides. Two of them flew up at our approach. In Rajasthan we have both the Grey and the Painted Partridges, but no Black Partridge.

Overhanging the water was a babul tree and just a foot above the level of the lake was a branch which seemed to be the favourite perch of a Whitebrowed Frantail Flycatcher. It hawked insects above the water and returned to this perch every time. According to the books this bird is found all over India, but in Bombay one sees the Whitespotted variety much more frequently. Not far from here on the telegraph wire there was a pair of Pied Kingfishers. Most kingfishers are handsome by virtue of their colours. But they are not always very shapely birds, as the bill is disproportionately long. These Pied Kingfishers though comparatively sober coloured are nevertheless very handsome birds. When they hover in the air over a prospective meal, they make an unforgettable picture. About 50 yards away from where they were perched I noticed the little mound covered with the white of bird droppings. And before I could speculate further one of the kingfishers came and sat on the mound. A short distance away from this place was a mud wall with a small branch of a shrub sticking out. This too was covered with

droppings. Almost next to it was a round hole which I presumed was the nest. It was surrounded by a puddle of water, so I couldn't go too near. But the birds sensing my interest in their affairs got very agitated. Both of them started to call loudly and twisted and turned on the telegraph wire until I moved away. The nesting season is between October and May and both the parents share the domestic duties. This species is found almost all over India in one form or another.

There were several Whitebreasted Kingfishers around the lake, screaming away from time to time. Towards sunset a large flock of common green bee-eaters, Dusky Crag Martins and Swallows arrived on the scene. A few of the swallows looked very much whiter from underneath than the others, and when they passed overhead I noticed the wires on their tails. These wiretailed swallows are also a little larger than the Common Swallows and they have a louder call - chek, chek. On the bushes there were Purple Sunbirds in their non-breeding plumage. They looked brown and yellow with a dark throat stripe and there was nothing purple about them. There were Ashy Wren Warblers, the Rufousbelly Babbler, Blue Jays, Roseringed Parakeets, Large Grey Rabblers, Cattle Egrets, Little Egret, Spotted Owlets, Redwattled Lapwing, Rosy Pastors, Scarlet Minivets, Brahminy Mynas, Indian Robin, Marshall's Iora, Common Whitethroat. Though I did not see the bird the sharp calls revealed the presence of Blyth's Reedwarbler.

As the sun went down and the birds started to make for the roosts, I noticed a solitary night heron sitting knee-deep in water under a babul tree. What was more exciting was the hovering form of a blackwinged kite on a hillside. The bird hovered for a minute or so, then descended perpendicularly with wings held above the body. It seemed to have missed its mark for there was nothing in its claws when it came into view again. The hovering and descent is always a sight that one remembers with joy. The last time that I saw this bird hovering was in the Rann of Kutch, though subsequently I did see two stationary models in the Aarey Milk Colony at Bombay.

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AUSTRALIA'S LYREBIRDS

Courtesy Australian High Commission,

New Delhi.

Australian lyrebirds are unique in appearance and behaviour. Bird-lovers travel many thousands of miles to observe their brilliant, rainbow displays and dancing and listen to their clever mimicry.

For some time after the birds were first discovered, they were considered to resemble a certain kind of pheasant. Now they are included among the perching birds in a distinct suborder, MENURAE.

There are two species: the superb lyrebird found from Melbourne all along the Great Dividing Range to south-east Queensland and Prince Albert's lyrebird, restricted to rain-forests near the east junction of Queensland and New South Wales.

The male superb lyrebird is about as big as a domestic hen, with a grey-brown head, bright rufous-coloured wings, and a long, decorative tail. There are two beautiful lyre feathers about 30 in. long and 1½ in. wide in shades of silver-mauve, with crescent-shaped golden-brown markings, black at the curved tip; two wire-like plumed feathers of brown-grey and 12 filamentary feathers. These are grey-white in repose but when flashed above the lyrebird's head refract and reflect the light in a shower of glowing, soft colour.

Lyrebirds have powerful feet and very strong claws, well adapted for raking and sifting the earth as they seek the worms, small insects, land crustaceans and small land molluscs which make up their food. The wings are short and occasionally used in normal flight, but most of the lyrebirds' aerial movements consist of flying jumps among trees and rocks, and skimming down hillsides.

For many years the shape of the lyrebird's nest remained a mystery to bird-lovers but in 1846, a Gippsland track-blazer, Mr. G.H. Haydon, accurately described the large dome-like structure.

The breeding season for both species of lyrebird extends from late autumn to early spring, and the female does all the work of building the nest, brooding, and feeding the nestling. The nest is built chiefly of sticks skilfully and ferns. The chamber is sufficiently large for the nestling to stand erect; and the floor is lined with feathers plucked by the mother-bird from her own flanks. It is not unusual for the lyrebird to build a 'nest-platform' or 'cradle-nest', which serves as the basis for a nest later.

Nests in Victoria are usually built at the base of large trees or stumps; and in the Sydney area on the ledges of sandstone cliffs. In the granite belt of north New South Wales and south-east Queensland they are often balanced precariously on the smooth ledges of huge boulders. Occasionally a nest is placed high in a large tree; one was found in Sherbrooke Forest, Victoria about 80 ft. from the ground.

The egg may be laid any time between the end of May and early August. After it is laid, it is neglected for several days before incubation begins. The incubation period averages six weeks (in cold regions it is longer), and the chick is in the nest for the same period. Altogether nesting activities occupy the mother-bird for about four months.

The chick at birth is a sightless gollywog clothed in black fluff. On the whole the lyrebird is untroubled by natural enemies, but the chick is well guarded by the mother, who becomes very aggressive when aroused. Even the fledgling can produce an ear-splitting shriek.

The male lyrebird displays and sings throughout the year except when moulting but only in the courting and breeding season does he produce the 'recitals' that have become world-famous.

Sometimes the bird will display on a log or tree-branch, but on other occasions he builds a special platform or circular clearing in the bracken about 3 ft. in diameter, with the soft earth slightly built up.

Apart from its beauty in display, the lyrebird has little trouble in imitating the screech of cockatoos, the 'laughter' of kookaburras, the lisping of robins and the chirping of other small birds.

The female birds are very good mimics, if less declamatory and constant than their mates.

Careful analysis has revealed that a lyrebird may render at a single concert as many as 40 different calls.

Before 1920, it appeared likely that the Australian lyrebird might disappear. Large numbers were being slaughtered for their feathers, which sold in Melbourne at from 2s. 6d. to £1. 10s. a pair. A strong publicity campaign made bird-lovers aware of the damage that was being done, however, and legal protection was introduced.

The Albert lyrebird - the second species of lyrebird - has a less ornamental tail than its relative and has never been severely persecuted; but because its range is very restricted - only about 150 miles in depth and 60 miles in width - clearing has had a relatively serious effect. The bird still frequents rain-forests from the Richmond River, New South Wales, in the south to Tambourine Mountain and the Blackall Range, Queensland, in the north.

Lyrebirds are generally observed singly, but often in pairs. Their call is a resounding choo! choo! choo! usually uttered at daybreak, or as a prelude to a bush-bird concert.

During the day, the lyrebird spends its time on the ground scratching among the fallen leaves and debris, or tearing rotten logs in search of food. At night it roosts high in the branches of tall trees.

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WHITECOLLARED KINGFISHER, Halcyon chloris

By

Mr. J.N. McKelvie

British High Commission, Calcutta

On 12 May 1965 my wife and I noticed an unusual kingfisher in the Botanical Gardens, Calcutta. About the same size as the Whitebreasted species, it was seen about 20 ft. above the ground, perched on a rather bare branch. It flew to another tree some yards away, then back again to the first, then again to the other tree.

Though I had once seen Halcyon chloris humii on the East Coast of Malaysia, I am indebted to my friend Dr. B. Biswas of the Zoological Survey of India, Calcutta, for confirmation that the Whitecollared Kingfisher is found in these parts. The back, wings and tail were of a greenish blue which somewhat resembled a verditer blue; the throat, breast and rest of the underparts were white, and there was a white collar right round the back of the neck. The beak seemed bi-coloured, the upper part appearing darker and the lower part rather more fleshy in colour -- as seen from below. There was a black line behind the eye and a white marking in front of the eye. The bird uttered no call.

I understand from Dr. B. Biswas that this species may be met with South of Calcutta, e.g. at Diamond Harbour, but is rarely seen in Calcutta itself. The white marking in front of the eye resembles that of the Forest Kingfisher (Halcyon macleayi) of Australia which I saw on 14.11.55 near Calcutta. Indeed the illustration of the Australian species in Neville Cayley's WHAT BIRD IS THAT? approximates very closely to the Whitecollared species.

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REVIEW

SOME INDIAN WEAVER BIRDS. By V.C. Ambedkar. pp. 72 with one black and white plate. University of Bombay. Price Rs5.

More than 30 years ago Salim Ali did a piece of field work which was perhaps his first major original contribution to Indian Ornithology. He studied the breeding and nesting habits of the Indian Weaver Bird, and discovered those amazing facts about their breeding biology which are by now common knowledge among all birdwatchers here.

While searching for a subject for this M.Sc. thesis, V.C. Ambedkar decided to carry forward the same study and include other weavers in it. The dimorphism among the weavers and the fact that they nest in colonies in open accessible places which are comparatively easy to keep under observation, were factors which helped Mr. Ambedkar in his work. For the

rest, it still took over 4 years of patient and careful work to prepare this near-complete account of the breeding biology of the weaver birds. The Common Baya was the particular species which was studied in great detail, but short accounts of the reproductive behaviour of the other 3 weavers are given in the last chapter.

In the four years' period of his intense study, Mr. Ambedkar naturally collected a vast amount of data. The presentation of this material is arranged with admirable clarity and simplicity. The thesis now published is extremely useful not only because it gives an accurate and detailed description of the life history of the baya; it will also serve as a guide and model for those birdwatchers who wish to carry out a specialized study of any particular species.

L.F.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

Destruction of Crows

Prominent naturalists have been writing on the subject about the desirability of limiting the crow population of this country in the interest of allowing more pleasing birds to multiply about cities. Mr. M. Krishnan (The Times of India, 4 July 1965) writes on the same subject. He said that during the past few years he has noticed an increase in the proportion of Jungle Crows in cities. The Jungle Crow is even a greater menace -- if such a thing were possible -- than the House Crow. All bird lovers must get together to check this population explosion among crows. One simple remedy suggested by Mr. Krishnan can be put into immediate effect, if we are less liberal in throwing out kitchen refuse in the open, one of the strongest incentives for the crows to remain in close proximity with us will be destroyed.

CORRESPONDENCE

'Little Egrets (Egretta garzetta) breeding in Kerala'

Reference the note from Mr. Nanu Nair; May 1965 issue of the Newsletter.

The title of the piece is misleading. The presence of birds in breeding plumage is not evidence of breeding in the locality where they are found, especially when they happen to be birds capable of long and sustained flight. Walayar is on the Kerala-Madras border and there is every possibility of the egrets building nests miles away from Walayar, in Madras State. I have records of Little Egrets with nuchal crests dating from 1943, but so far I have not heard of any place in Kerala where these birds nest. Similarly, just when the monsoon breaks, one comes across larger numbers of Cattle Egrets in various phases of breeding plumage in Palghat District, Alwaye and Trivandrum; but the only place where I have seen nests is Kunisseri in Alatur Taluk, Palghat District. This was more than 20 years ago.

K.K. Neelakantan

Trivandrum, 22 May 1965.

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Birdwatching near a solitary tree

In front of my house across the road is a giant peepal tree. It stands like an ancient monument gasping for breath. Its trunk is half rotten and

eaten up due to old age but its branches appear solid and the crop of leaves and buds look new, verdent and have a shine of rejuvenated brightness. On Sundays and on holidays I watch its avian visitors from my perch on the verandah.

Morning visitors are the parakeets, coppersmiths with their incessant hammerings, koels, bulbuls, a pair of golden orioles and some Brahmany Mynas. But in the evenings the gathering starts. The first to arrive are a pair of vultures. They come and perch on one side and keep on flapping their unwieldy wings. Then the mynas arrive, at least about a hundred of them and drown every other noise with their continuous noisy quarreling. They try to usurp every available space with callous indifference to anybody's feeling. The next on the list are the Blue Rock Pigeons, about 20 of them. They quietly settle down in one corner and innocently watch the commotion created by the mynas. A few crows also butt in and join this wild chorus. A pair of koel then arrive and flit from branch to branch sheepishly and afraid of the din. A solitary green pigeon is the last arrival before the shades of the evening close in, leaving the world into the darkness and unto me.

Major A. David

Delhi; 6 April, 1965.

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Bengal Florican in the Kaziranga Sanctuary

Thank you so much for your letter clearing up the mystery of the Kaziranga Birds. I have read Whistler's description of the Bengal Florican and feel now that I must agree with Salim Ali! I did think of Floricans before since we saw them when we first visited the Manas Sanctuary some five years ago. In Kaziranga I got the impression of larger birds and was also impressed by the peculiar effect of a cowl -- however, in the poor light imagination could so easily run riot!

..... The extracts from the old issues of the Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society give strength to Salim Ali's identification and my determination to seize the very next opportunity.

Mrs. Maureen Thom

Gauhati, April 1965.

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NEWSLETTER

FOR BIRDWATCHERS

Volume 5-1965 August



NEWSLETTER
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CONTENTS

Water-birds in Sind. By D.A. Holmes	1
The Large Sand Plover (<u>Charadrius leschenaulti</u>) in Delhi. By (Mrs.) Usha Ganguli	5
Interference with a nest site of the Yellow-wattled Lapwing. By S.D. Jayakar and H. Spurway	6
Notes on some birds observed at Naini Tal. By V. Udaya Shan- kar Rao	7
One day's sea-shore stroll. By T.V. Jose	8
A Coucal caught in a box-trap. By S.S. Saha	9
Review:	
ENJOYING ORNITHOLOGY. (Z.F.)	9
Notes and Comments	9
Correspondence:	
Bird Notes. By E.W. Ramble (p. 10); Owl Noises. By Mrs. J. L. Thom (p. 10)	
A Correction	11

WATER-BIRDS IN SIND

By

D. A. Holmes

The Newsletter grows monthly more interesting and like others I feel inspired to put pen to paper, although I cannot hope to maintain the high standards of some recent articles.

My title may seem anomalous to some but the Sind Desert is a widely held misconception. Despite its indubitably hot desert climate most of this region is not desert. The annual inundation of the Indus, now contained and regulated, maintains an abundance of jheels, and water-logging menaces the agriculture of the region. The result is a wealth of water-birds which provide my most exciting birdwatching.

In autumn the paddyfields ring with the lovely calls of Green- and Wood Sandpipers, the forerunners of the waders that abound in the area in winter. From November to February the sound of guns (far too many of them) keep the wings of thousands of duck whistling over every jheel, and crakes and bitterns can be flushed from any reedbed.

The current hot season, however, has provided John Wright and myself with some of our greatest thrills in the 2 to 3 years we have been here, and in fact we seem unable to go out without adding at least one new bird to our list. Near Sujawal recently (an area famous for its duck in winter, and a stronghold of indigenous Indian duck in Sind) we saw two Kora or Water Cocks about a mile apart beside a canal road. Although possibly common in parts of India we had never expected to find it here where it is reputed to be very rare, and even the indefatigable Doig did not find it on the Nara. Two villagers in our car, however, recognized it immediately as Tubar which suggests that it is well known in this area (and an article of diet!). Five days later we saw one near Hyderabad! We were also fortunate in finding a party of the interesting little Cotton Teal, and the Lesser Whistling Teal has recently arrived in large numbers here and in the inundated riverain forests near Hyderabad. Spotbill are less common, and only one colony of the Marbled Teal with its smudged eye-black, has been located (near Khairpur). We have little hope of seeing the Nukta (but we did not expect the Water Cock either!).

We have only recently 'discovered' one intriguing group of birds -- the Small Bitterns. More than a fleeting view of a bittern in its short flights over reedbeds when flushed, or at dawn or evening, is rarely seen, and we had assumed that even if we were lucky enough to see one we would not be able to identify it. A night at Jamraohead where the Eastern Nara emerges from the Thar sandhills dispelled that illusion. The inspection bungalow there commands a magnificent view over many acres of reedbed and we spent the whole evening on the roof, and slept there ready for the dawn flight, in spite of clouds of especially virulent mosquitoes. We were rewarded by excellent views of Chestnut-, Yellow-, and Black Bitterns and found that even the briefest view in flight is sufficient for identification (of the males at any rate).

The Chestnut Bittern is well named as both sexes appear uniform chestnut all over, brighter in the male. The male has a black medial streak down the underparts while the female is strongly streaked with deeper chestnut. Both sexes of the Yellow Bittern are much paler -- a tawny to yellow buff with very distinctive black hind margins to the wings. The male Black Bittern is also simple to identify, appearing from the rear as a uniform black (a casual glance may dismiss it as one of the cormorants!). In side or front views the pale throat streaked with black, and yellow sides to the neck are seen. The female, though browner, still appears very dark. We have yet to see the Little Bittern (though Ripley does not imply rarity) in this country. One seen in England showed very distinctive pale patches on the wings, obvious even in poor light. One of these birds we have difficulty with is the Little Green Heron. All descriptions stress the green-ness, whereas in all but one of the birds we consider to have been this species no sign of green was seen, though all other characteristics fit including the peculiar characteristic stance illustrated in an earlier Newsletter. It is not possible that all the birds we have seen have been immature? If so it implies a great preponderance of immatures and in fact one was seen sitting on eggs (in June). Perhaps a reader can help on this point. Apart from the larger herons and the egrets the only other member of the family in this area is the Bittern. This is a much larger bird, only occurring in winter, and appearing a deep rich brown, heavily streaked, all over. Since our visit to Jamraohead we have met these small bitterns in almost every reedbed and we suspect a summer influx.

Our most interesting birds this summer have been found on three jheels (dhand - Sindhi) near Thatta. These are Jebel foot lakes formed by the ponding of flood water between the jebel and the alluvial plain built up by historic courses of the Indus. Two of these (Jhol dhand and Hadeiro dhand) are saline, with no surface outlet for the water while the third (Kalri Lake) is fresh, an artificial reservoir formed from several smaller dhands and fed from the Indus. This barren land of limestone, blasted by the furnace hot sea breeze, laden with dust, grit, and salt, that 'favours' Sind at this season is an inhospitable place, and although the vast expanse of Kalri Lake does a lot to relieve this monotony it is unfortunately the least rewarding of the three ornithologically. The interesting birds at Kalri Lake are concentrated in the seepage zone outside the containing bund. Although this bund provides an excellent vantage point it unfortunately lies parallel to the sea breeze and the blowing grit soon discourages the most enthusiastic observer. This area is a favourite resort of Flamingos and from about 100 of these in February numbers rose steadily to some 800 by May 30. By this date we had 'discovered' the two saline dhands and the population of the three was then of the order of 2500 as far as it is possible to estimate the numbers of pink, white, and scarlet blobs shimmering in the heat haze. A herd of these birds is one of the loveliest of all avian sights, especially when they take to the wing. All birds seen at close range were the Flamingo with a pink bill on the male (as compared to a scarlet bill on the male Lesser Flamingo). These birds are clearly not breeding at this season and at least half of them are immature with white plumage and bills. A tally on their population in the coming months may show when they leave for their breeding grounds (or have they already bred?). One assumes that these birds belong to the Rann of Kutch population but with these rather erratic birds assumptions may be dangerous.

The delicate lines of the black and white Avocet feeding all round the shores provide the eyes with some relief from the showy splendour of the flamingos, and contrast with the ubiquitous, more ungainly, and rather clownish Blackwinged Stilts. Ticehurst never saw the Avocet later than May 24, but there were 700 here on May 30 and one was seen at Hyderabad on June 5.

Glossy Ibis and Pelicans (both White Pelican and Dalmatian Pelican) are locally common in winter in the south of Sind but we were surprised to find about 25 White Pelicans on May 23. A few Spoonbill, that white egret-like bird so aptly named, are often found in small parties associated with flamingos and have a similar scything action when feeding.

The waders on these dhands in May were even more interesting. We saw our first Golden Plovers, 8 birds with their breeding plumage sufficiently advanced to show them to be of the usual Eastern form (Pluvialis dominica). Curlew Sandpipers, and Dunlin were there in force, a solitary Turnstone, and even more surprising, a solitary Ringed Plover (Charadrius hiaticus), previously only a doubtful bird on my list for Sind but now definitely identified. These are all coastal wintering birds and were on route to their northern breeding grounds. Except for the Ringed Plover all subsequently appeared in Hyderabad. Many were in breeding plumage and the bright rufous of the Curlew Sandpiper, the black belly of the Dunlin, the pied head of the Turnstone (and incidentally the black of the occasional Spotted Redshank which was always present) made identification easy in birds which might otherwise have been difficult.

One wader, obviously a small plover from its shape and movements gave us some difficulty. At first there seemed to be two types involved. Some had white foreheads and a delicate pink flush on the breast while others had black foreheads extending round through the eye and a broad, deep rufous band through the chest -- the Lesser Sand Plover in all transitions of plumage. Since this was the commonest wader there it is of special interest to note that Ticehurst considered it to be unknown inland in Sind. They were much less common on the freshwater Kalri Lake, but there was even a party of 30 at Hyderabad in late May and odd individuals were seen here as late as June 12.

Interesting as these waders were they were broad and butter compared to the jam to come. Imagine our delight on topping a ridge to meet 28 Rednecked Phalaropes bobbing, dipping and circling daintily in their aquatic pirouette near the lake edge. These actions were enough to identify these birds immediately as phalaropes and like the Sand Plovers they showed all transitions to breeding plumage, making specific identification easy. There were parties on both saline lakes (80 on one) and later we saw a small flock at Hyderabad. Ticehurst states that this phalarope regularly stops inland in September but 'they naturally do not hold in spring.' So they had no right to be there! But neither had the Sand Plovers, the Ringed Plover or the Turnstone!

To round out a magnificent day yet another rarity, again quite at the wrong time of year according to the books, four Great Crested Grebes. Their breeding ruffs were well developed, and swimming and diving in the middle of the lake they immediately took us back from this barren inferno to the cool greenness of an English ornamental lake.

So it is not memories of desert birds that I shall be taking home from Sind, but of water-birds; water-birds everywhere, of all shapes and sizes, and in numerical abundance.

But there are some sad exceptions. Where today are the Painted Storks, Openbills, and Blacknecked Storks that were so common in Lower Sind 50 years ago?; the Black Ibis in their 'large flocks around most jheels'? The first two we have yet to see while the other three are so rare that we have only isolated records of single birds. We are told that the duck population is also declining and although this may be difficult for a new-comer to believe when the sky is blackened by them in winter, certainly the Barheaded Goose and the Greylag Goose are now great rarities.

Such a marked decline is very alarming indeed and it is most important that others should compare early records for their own areas to see whether this is a purely local decline or whether it is one affecting the whole subcontinent. My own knowledge is too limited to postulate reasons, but since jheels are still as abundant it would seem most likely that the cause lies in the activities of man. Since the first barrage was opened in 1932 settlement has spread to every corner, with an influx of farmers from other regions, and this with the concomitant increase in shikaris with modern guns must have driven the birds from their former strongholds. There are of course a huge number of jheels we have never visited including parts of the borders of the Rann of Kutch and the famous Manchar Lake, and we still hope one day to find an isolated jheel full of these missing birds. This will only provide us with more ticks on our list however; it won't disprove their decline. (Manchar must still have a large bird population -- a letter in a local paper recently suggested the extraction of oil from 'Yellow Pelicans' as a possible local industry!)

The references in this text to Ticehurst refer to the wonderfully comprehensive paper by Dr. C.B. Ticehurst on 'The Birds of Sind' in 8 numbers of Ibis 1922-24. Doig was an engineer on the Eastern Nara in about 1870 to whom Ticehurst constantly refers since he missed little in that interesting area. Dr. Salim Ali also visited this region and wrote a note on 'The Birds of Manchar Lake' in the Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society.

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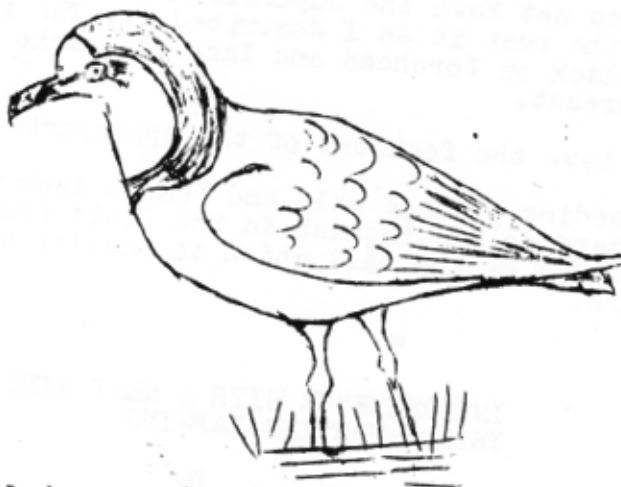
THE LARGE SAND PLOVER (CHARADRIUS LESCHENAUTI)
IN DELHI

By

(Mrs.) Usha Ganguli

On June 6, 1965 I went to Shampur Jhil west of Najafgarh Lake to watch birds. This is a fine place for them and Peter Jackson who 'discovered' it will write about it later.

That afternoon, when I was about 25 yards from the lake, a little plover ran into shallow waters at the edge of it. I trained my telescope on it. I had it under observation for nearly 15 minutes. What struck me immediately was its thick black bill nearly an inch long and its glistening white forehead. I took it for the Lesser Sand Plover which I had seen once eight years ago and could not recall its breeding plumage. I drew a sketch and took detailed notes of its plumage and call. It was standing by itself and there were no small waders nearby to give a correct idea of its size; all I could see was that it was bigger than a Little Ringed Plover



Below I give a full description:

- Size : Larger than Little Ringed Plover
Bill : Stout, black, about an inch long
Eyes : Dark brown

Description:

1. Glistening white forehead divided by a narrow irregular blackish line from the ashy brown crown.
2. A faint dark line from bill across the forehead to the edge of the crown.
3. A prominent dark line from the base of the bill through the eyes to the ear-coverts.

4. A thin white supercilium extending beyond the ear-coverts to join the white neck.

5. Nape rufous changing to brown where it joins the breast band.

6. Whole underside white except for brown or light chestnut breast band which is narrow at the centre.

7. Back uniform sandy brown.

Call was a melodious trill Kr r r r r r r with the emphasis on Kr.

When I consulted FBI, I realized that the bird was not the Lesser Sand Plover but possibly the Large Sand Plover. This plover is on our check-list as very uncommon and Mr. Horace Alexander had 'noted single birds on migration between mid April and early June.'

I sent the sketch together with the description to Dr. Salim Ali who kindly confirmed the identification saying that it was getting into breeding plumage.

Yesterday (10 July 1965), while reading the obituary of Sir Geoffrey Archer in the Ibis (April 1965), I came to know that he was the first to 'confirm the breeding on the African coast of Charadrius leschenaulti by finding the young in down.' I then consulted MacNorth Praed & Grant's BIRDS OF THE SOUTHERN THIRD OF AFRICA, and gathered the following information. Its breeding range is the African coast of the Red Sea, apart from NE. Asia. In this plover the male and the female have different plumage (FBI does not mention this fact). The male in full breeding plumage does not have the supercilium and the back is pale chestnut; the rest is as I described it. The female does not have any black on forehead and face and lacks the chestnut on back and breast.

The young have the feathers of the upperparts edged with rufous.

In non-breeding plumage male and female look alike and then they are very hard to distinguish in the field from the Lesser Sand Plover, except by the bill which is smaller and lighter in the latter bird.

* * * *

INTERFERENCE WITH A NEST SITE OF THE YELLOW-WATTLED LAPWING

By

S.D. Jayakar and H. Spurway

Once again we appeal to birdwatchers for information on behaviour that we have observed in the Yellow-wattled Lapwing.

A pair which is nesting in and around our garden this year -- and we have reason to believe it is the same pair that nested in this territory last year (see Newsletter, August and September '64) -- had all the eggs in their first nest in our garden eaten by a rat-snake on March 16, and the one egg found on 25/iii in their second nest also destroyed on 27/iii. On 29/iii we found the first egg in their third nest in the garden of our neighbour Shri S.K. Ghose. Only two eggs were laid (the other also on 29/iii) in this nest, as compared with the usual 4 of a plover's nest. Perhaps these eggs

and the previous 1 together constituted one clutch physiologically. We of course inspected this nest more or less regularly, and on 18/iv we were surprised to see that the eggs had been removed from their pebbly scrape and were now lying 70 cm. north of their original site at the bottom of a pit about 4 cm. deep; made by removing a half-buried stone. After some questioning, the mali admitted that he and another servant had feared for the safety of the nest, and had moved it to a 'safer' location. We were extremely worried as to whether the parents would desert the eggs, but the same evening, one bird was seen flying away from it as we approached it with a battery torch.

The parents gradually filled the pit up with pebbles, and on April 26, frantic screaming announced to us that at least one egg/hatched. On going to the nest, we discovered to our horror that the same mali had again tried to be helpful. As he had seen the two chicks running in and out of the nest, and as there was a dog near it, he had emptied the pit of pebbles, and surrounded it with big stones to protect the chicks. We removed the stones and filled the pit up again and both chicks next day left the garden with their parents. They are both still alive today (18/v).

Have any of our readers any records of ground nesting birds accepting a small displacement of the eggs?

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NOTES ON SOME BIRDS OBSERVED AT NAINI TAL

By

V. Udaya Shankar Rao

The Summer School in Solid State Physics organized by the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research at Naini Tal between 2nd and 22nd May this year provided us a fine opportunity to observe the birdlife in and around this beautiful hill station. Professor K.W.H. Stevens of the University of Nottingham and I devoted much of our spare time to birdwatching. Here I would like to report a few interesting observations.

A pair of Himalayan Tree-Creepers were found nesting in a small crevice in the wooden framework of Naini Tal Club. The nesting of these birds in an inhabited building is perhaps a rare occurrence. The nest was placed five feet above the ground and already contained young ones on May 2. The entrance to the nest was very narrow and did not permit us to get a view of the nestlings. Both the male and female were actively feeding the young. Their trips to the nest were most frequent early in the morning. Sometimes, both the birds would arrive simultaneously with food. However, only one bird could get into the nest at a time and the other one would wait impatiently outside the nest till the first bird came out. On 16th May, the nest was empty much to our regret for having missed seeing the young birds venture into the outside world.

On two occasions we were surprised to find birds well above the elevations at which they are normally known to occur. The call of the Black Partridge was heard at Mukteswar at a height of 7500 ft. A single Brahminy Myna was seen at Naini Tal at an elevation of 6500 ft. Salim Ali in THE BOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS mentions that these birds occur commonly up to 5000 ft. and 4000 ft. respectively in the Himalayas.

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ONE DAY'S SEA-SHORE STROLL

By

T. V. Jose

[Opposite the Tata Fundamental Research Institute, Colaba, Bombay, there is a marshy area which is frequented by a variety of waders. It is there the present observation on 27.iii.1965 was made. Wanton killing of these birds is a common occurrence here.]

As soon as I reached the sea-shore, I heard the report of a gun. It was about 200 yards away from me. What was shot at was not clear. I continued my walk this time in the direction of the shot. Hardly had I gone 30 ft. when I saw a wading bird much bigger than a common sand piper with a white rump flying in the opposite direction, away from me. It was perhaps a wounded one, for the flight of the bird, I particularly noticed, was not steady or strong. Yet those clumsy jungle crows could not touch the bird. But as the wounded one flew on dodging and diving with its flickering energy it was waging a losing war. It flew over a mud embankment and dipped again into the flat depression of space between one embankment and the other. The number of crows appeared to be increasing every moment.

The cry of the bird and the clamour of jungle crows invited the attention of what seemed to be a Pariah Kite which was some distance away from the incident. The kite now entered the chase. The wounded bird had reached the far side of the flat space and could not fly further without flying higher to cross over the mud embankment that now obstructed its way. It returned, but it had lost much of its energy. The kite did not mind the crows that pursued, and at last caught the bird in its talons.

All the crows now turned against the kite. It fought back with ease. Some soon lost interest and went away. However, one tenaciously pursued and pestered the kite. The kite did not simply try to evade the jabs of the crow, but attacked back with vehemence. The poor bird in the kite's talons was writhing and trying to extricate itself from the piercing claws. The kite and crows now drifted to a distance hindered by building tops.

Dusk was getting darker. I turned to the gunman. I saw that he was the murderer of ten Little Stints, pretty birds now reduced to lifeless dross of feather, beak, and legs.

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A COUCAL CAUGHT IN A BOX-TRAP

By

S. S. Saha

In connexion with the habits and behaviour of the Crow-pheasant or Coucal on which several notes were published in the earlier issues of the Newsletter, the present report may be of interest to the readers.

On 13th November 1964, I went to a village some 60 km. east of Calcutta, and set box-traps (size 20 x 45 cm.) with fish and meat baits for the purpose of trapping small carnivores.

While checking the box-traps at noon, I found, to my great surprise, a Coucal trapped in one of the traps set beside a cultivated paddy-field bordered by bamboo shrubs and fallow lands shaded by big trees and thickets.

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REVIEW

ENJOYING ORNITHOLOGY. By David Lack. pp. 263. Illustrated by Robert Gillmor. London 1965. Methuen & Co. Ltd.

When the author was a young boy he noticed a male nightjar brooding the young. This was contrary to the information given in the books. He continued with the observations and established the fact for the first time that nightjars were double brooded. It also taught him the valuable lesson early in life that everything written in books need not necessarily be true. He has been studying birds for 36 years, the last 19 as a profession. He is now the Director of the Edward Grey Institute of Field Ornithology, and the current President of the International Ornithological Congress.

The 23 chapters in the book are reprints of his sparkling talks over the radio and of the articles published in various scientific journals. These were directed primarily at those having a general interest in natural history rather than at the ornithological specialists. Therefore no tedious graphs, and no labouring over technical problems which do not hold the attention of the amateur birdwatcher. Every object is of absorbing interest and the later section where 'light hearted darts (are) aimed seriously' bring the reader up to date with the controversies raging in the highest ornithological circles. The chapter called 'An undescribed Species of Swift' is a masterpiece of imaginative writing and obviously made at those who wish to establish new facts by deducing them from tenuous evidence. "Wherever a palatable natural food exists an animal has been evolved which preys upon it . . . the abundant acroplankton must surely support a predator." Thus is established the fact that 1000 metres above the earth Hardy's Swift (*Apus durus*) takes over from Common Swift *Apus apus*. The high altitudes which it frequents constitute the chief reason why it has not yet been seen by the numerous bird-watchers who throng our fast-vanishing sewage farms to add yet another species to their life-lists. But though it never comes within visual range, Hardy's Swift is regularly detected by radar. This has until now been obscured by the unwarranted Air Force terminology by which the echoes in question have been classified as 'Angels'. However, *angeli non resonant* (Aquinas 1275; *De Caelo*), and the blips in question obviously come from Hardy's Swifts."

The majority of the chapters deal with migration. The author discovered several new facts about bird movements at high altitudes by use of radar equipment placed at his disposal by the Air Force. Ends are not always what they seem. Our theories of migration have hitherto been based on visual observation. Apparently much that goes on beyond the range of our sight high up in the heavens is of much greater significance.

30 sh. is a small price for this enthralling book. (Z.F.)

NOTES AND COMMENTS

It is cheering to read the first line of this Newsletter which says that it grows monthly more interesting. Readers must have noticed that an increasing number of Britishers, men and women, have been writing for this paper. This is understandable for as David Lack writes in the book reviewed in this issue " . . . we English . . . after all, invented bird watching." All glory to England if this is true.

May we appeal to our readers again to keep careful notes about two of the projects we have launched, but which have not gone very far as yet: (1) studying the life-history of the House Sparrow; (2) studying the movements of the Rosy Pastors within our country. The Pastors will start coming in soon and if we all cooperate we will be able to draw up a most useful map of their movements for the whole of our sub-continent.

CORRESPONDENCE

Bird Notes

I cannot really claim to be a true birdwatcher but am a very keen observer and have been for years. . . .

I have kept arrival dates of such local migrants as the Koel, Golden Oriole and also the Pied Crested Cuckoo right back to 1947 but perhaps I could include this in some later article.

E.W. Ramble

The Imperial Tobacco Co. of India Ltd
Saharanpur

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Owl Noises

I feel I must ask you for some more help over identification. For years now we have been haunted by owl noises! Smythies (p. 376), gives a most useful summary, but even with this we have been unable to identify all we have heard, since it is so difficult to translate bird calls into human sounds -- and owls seem capable of a fantastic range of them! We have been visited regularly by Spotted and Jungle Owlets, both by day and night, and we think we have their various calls 'taped' (literally, since I have been able to do some tape-recording in some cases!). But who calls on one note only, with the rhythm and persistence of a cradle being rocked; kood - kood; kood - kood; d d - d d, softly and peacefully for hours on end from dusk on? And what about the soft "who", on a descending note at intervals of 3-7 seconds, another peaceful accompaniment to our evenings? Salim Ali's description of the call of a Collared Scops Owl bears resemblance to this call -- but not Smythies's. We had heard it only at night until recently, but one late morning "who" surprised me from a tree in the garden -- and imagine my amazement when I tracked it down to rather a bedraggled Malcoha! I watched and listened, and felt I had no doubt that this was one of the sounds we had heard for so long -- but why should a Malcoha call all through the hours of darkness? Last night we heard the call in a Frangipani Tree close beside the bungalow -- and in spite of careful stalking disturbed a small, chunky grey bird like an owl -- and very far removed from the Malcoha!! Alas, it flew away before there was time to spot the presence of 'Horns'!

We are now so intrigued that we hope you won't mind our sharing two more problems with you!

Mrs. J.L. Thom
P.O.Box 10, Gauhati, Assam

Dr. Salim Ali comments on the calls as under:

"I think the first bird kood-kood, kood could be the Pigmy Owllet (Glaucidium brodiei) whose call to my ear is a pleasant whistling Toot . . . toot toot . . . toot repeated every few seconds. But this has one extra syllable at the beginning!

"The second who could be the Collared Scops Owl (Otus bakka-
..... 11

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moena which, as I hear it, has a mellow interrogative wut? repeated at intervals of 3 seconds or so, commencing soon after dusk and continuing intermittently more or less through the night. I cannot encourage the Malkoha theory!"

-- Ed.]

A CORRECTION

Newsletter for Birdwatchers Vol. 5, No. 7, July 1965, note on p. 7 about the White-Collared Kingfisher (Halcyon chloris):

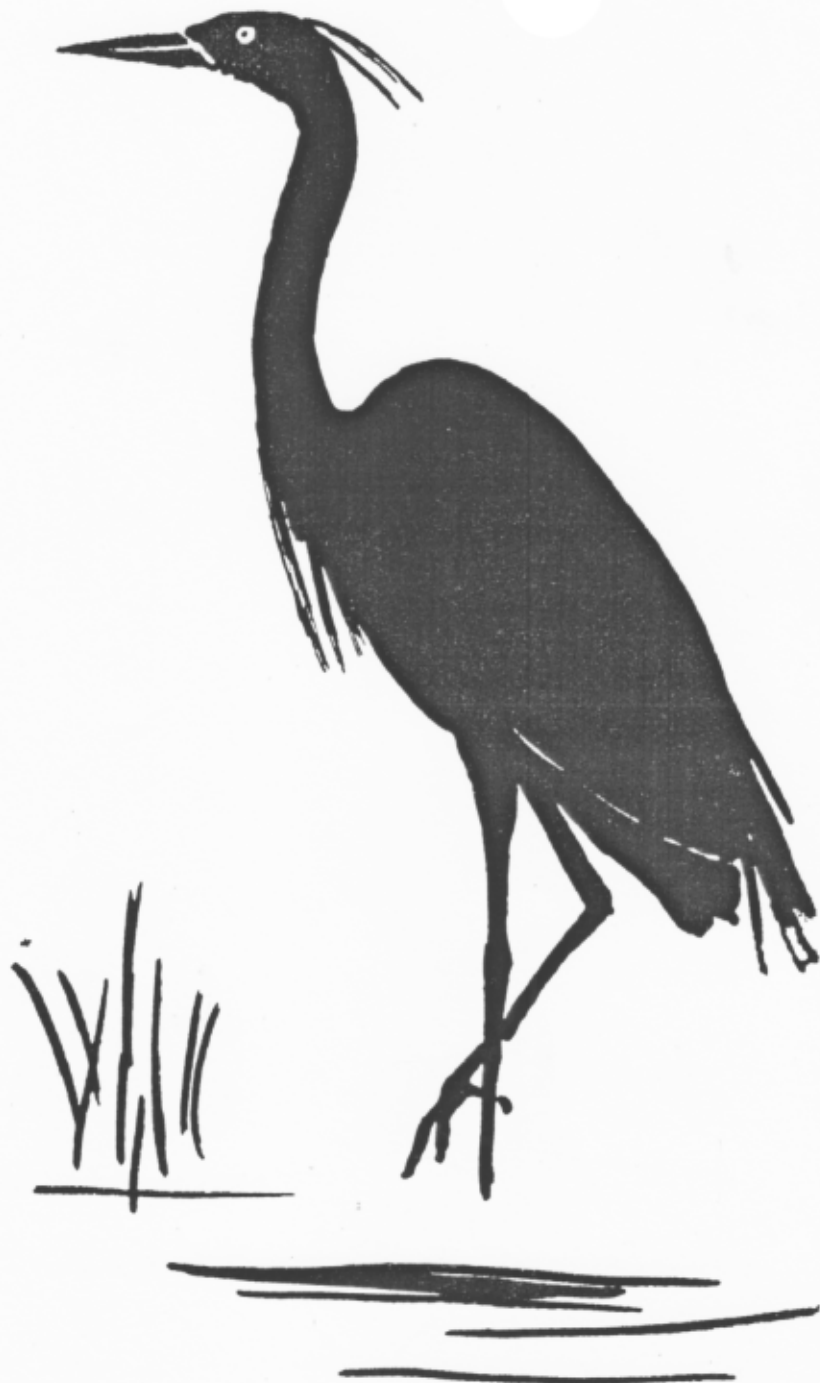
Mr. McKelvie has written to point out that the bird known as the Forest Kingfisher (Halcyon macleayi) which he saw in Australia on 14.xi.1955, was seen near Canberra in the Australian Capital Territory, and not 'near Calcutta'.

Zafar Futchally
Editor, Newsletter for Birdwatchers
32-A, Juhu Lane
Andheri, Bombay 58-AS

NEWSLETTER

FOR BIRDWATCHERS

Volume 5-1965 September



NEWSLETTER
FOR
BIRDWATCHERS

Vol. 5, No. 9

September 1965

CONTENTS

A visit to Ziarat. By J.O. Wright	1
Birdwatching in Kathmandu. By R.L. Fleming, Ph.D.	4
Bird observations by an angler. By E.W. Ramble	6
Notes and Comments	7
Correspondence	

Owl noises. By D.A. Holme (p. 7); What's this bird? By E. W. Ramble (p. 8); Breeding of the Little Egret in Kerala. By K.K. Nila-kantan (p. 9); Birdwatching in Patna. By Mrs. Jamal Ara (p. 9); Common name of the owl Bubo bubo. By Kameshwar Pal Singh (p. 10); Small displacement by ground nesting birds. By R.S. Dharmakumar-sinhji (p. 10); Birds in a Delhi garden. By Donald Erskine Crum (p. 10)

A VISIT TO ZIARAT

By

J. O. Wright

In the middle of April three of us, Tom Roberts, Derek Holmes, and myself, keen birdwatchers all, went for a birdwatching weekend in Ziarat (north of Quetta in Baluchistan).

Two of us travelled by road from Sukkur and the holiday really began for us when, crossing the Pat Desert, we saw several Hoopoe Larks. These were new birds for me, typical larks on the ground except for their large size but apparently changing to a different genus when they flew, with their unlikely rounded white-striped wings! The Ravens, so common in winter along the roadside from Jhatpat onwards in flocks of up to 100, had retreated to the hills again and apart from the Hoopoe Larks this desert, which stretches for 100 miles of flat clay, almost devoid of vegetation and continuously 'flooded' by mirages, was apparently birdless. At Sibi, on the northern edge of the plain, there were a few waders in roadside irrigation ditches.

On entering the Bolan Pass I remarked that in December the Bearded Vulture had been common right to the bottom of the pass, well under 1000 feet. This time we did not meet one till further up, probably about 2000 ft, -- still well under the 4000 foot minimum quoted by Ripley (and also outside the range quoted by him, though the

FAUNA OF BRITISH INDIA, Birds, describes eggs from Quetta). Rounding a bend toward the middle of the pass we were surprised to see a Pallas's Fish Eagle perched on a rock near the river. Ravens were also present quite low down the pass.

As we were anxious to reach Quetta we did not stop on the way, but among the smaller birds recognizable from the car, both the Pied Bush Chat and the Pied Wheatear occurred along the whole length of the pass. At the top (6000 ft.) we made a brief halt and identified the Isabelline Wheatear, the Brown Rock Pipit, and a pair of Kestrels. Blue Rock Pigeons also occurred well away from habitation and presumably truly wild in this barren rocky gorge.

The night was spent in Quetta where Tom joined us, having flown over Ziarat on his way from Multan, and depressed us with tales of thick snow over the area. Heavy rain during the night sent our spirits still lower.

Next morning, however, we became more cheerful on seeing a flock of Common Rosefinches in full scarlet, several Rosymantled Rosefinches (attractively named but nothing like so colourful as the Common Rosefinch!) with their siskin-like females squeaking like an un-oiled wheel, and Lichtenstein's Desert Finch all in the garden of the club. Ravens were very common, taking the place the House Crow occupies in the plains (the House Crow had not been seen after Sibi).

We were somewhat surprised to see House Sparrows as on previous visits to Quetta in March and December the only sparrow seen was the Tree Sparrow. Evidently the House Sparrow is a summer visitor here. Both species were present this time and were seen feeding together. It was pleasant to see the Swallow again as they had already left Sind; at Quetta they are breeding birds.

We left for Ziarat not very optimistic of seeing many birds, or even of reaching there, in view of the snow reported. Along the way we passed a carcass and noted that the commonest scavenger was the Griffon Vulture and was accompanied by several Cinereous Vultures. The Whitebacked Vulture, commonest vulture in Sind, was absent, as was the Egyptian Vulture although we had seen one or two of the latter in Quetta.

The heavy rain had made the road somewhat treacherous but an unintentional halt caused by the car slipping into a ditch enabled us to see our first Rock Nuthatch. Along the way we also saw Redbilled Chough (but solitary birds, not the large flocks seen on the fields in December), and the Common Swift, a breeding bird in the area.

Arriving at Ziarat (8000 ft.) we were relieved to find the snow nearly all melted and after finding accommodation (our letters had not arrived and most chowkidars of resthouses were away for Id) we took a walk up the hill among tall junipers. We were enthralled by the song of the Blue Whistling Thrush, and made homesick by the ubiquitous Mistle Thrush looking and singing exactly like the English bird. Magpies were also common and Indian Redstarts were singing their extraordinary mixture of wheezes, croaks, and harmony from every bush and tree. A Rufous-bellied Crested Tit was feeding among fallen juniper berries and a small party of Redheaded Tits were seen.

As night fell the sound of tiny hammers striking small bronze anvils came from all parts of the valley, each one a slightly different note, and by bedtime we were still undecided what bird was making the noise (or even if it was a bird!). I slept out on the verandah and was rewarded for the icicles in my

heard by a small owl that landed near my bed, called once to wake me, once again and then flew off still calling. This solved the problem -- a Striated Scops Owl. There must have been at least 8 calling at dusk.

In the morning a female Scalybellied Green Woodpecker came into the garden and a male was later tracked down. Both fed on the ground like European Green Woodpeckers. Another new bird ~~XXXXXX~~ was the Goldfronted Finch. I first saw these early in the morning in relatively silent flocks of about 20 individuals. Later we found solitary birds each singing from thick cover and each sound -ing like a whole flock of Goldfinches. The Rosymantled Rosefinch was common here but no Common Rosefinches were seen. Tom saw Himalayan Treecreepers and a Whitewinged Grosbeak and Derek and Tom both saw Bluethroats but in poor plumage. Redbreasted Flycatchers, one of the Lesser Whitethroats, and Stonechats were all common, the Stonechats in perfect plumage and chasing each other as though on the point of breeding. Several pairs of Kestrels were seen and one Sparrowhawk, perched on Juniper trees on the hillside, and in the valley bottom we found a third tit, the Grey Tit, Whitecapped Buntings abounded and a Streaked Scrub Warbler was flushed from some low, grass-entangled, bushes. Most Hoopoes had already left Sind but we saw one here.

We made a more leisurely return to Quetta and stopping at intervals we saw Chukor, Pale Crag Martin and Striated Swallow. Right at the top of the pass we saw, almost together, three different shrikes; the Great Grey Shrike, the Baybacked Shrike, and the Rufousbacked Shrike.

Along the whole route from Ziarat to Quetta we met parties of migrating House Sparrow. They had the grey crown of the house sparrow but had much smaller black bibs than the common house sparrow race of Sind (or Quetta) though not so small as the Sind Jungle Sparrow with which we are familiar.

We stopped for tea near a small river and were interrupted twice, once by the only waders we had seen after Sibi -- two Green Sandpipers -- and once by a much more exciting bird, a Buzzard which was soaring above the stream and settled on a rock quite near. It was rather a dark bird but had the unmistakable wing patten of the species.

In a small nulla near Quetta filled with low brush and small thin trees we flushed a Streaked Laughing Thrush, a most unlikely bird to find among these barren rocks, as it is normally a forest dweller and is here at the limit of its range. In the same nulla we found two Common Kingfishers, Collared Doves, Little Brown Doves and, for me, the last 'new' bird of the trip a Wryneck. The only bulbul seen during the weekend was the Whitecheeked Bulbul, the same race as in Sind with only a short crest. This was common at Quetta but not seen elsewhere.

During our return to Sukkur we saw a Chukor at the bottom of the pass (about 1000 feet). It was accompanied by another bird exactly similar but with a uniform brown head devoid of markings. We could only presume this was an aberrant individual (it was not a Grey Partridge with which we are familiar).

This was a truly memorable holiday and we were reluctant to return; a feeling which was accentuated when we later got a letter from Tom (forced to stay behind an extra day as bad weather prevented the plane from landing) who had later seen 8 Kestrels hawking for insects which they caught with their feet, Pale Crag Martins, Redrumped Swallows, and Common Swifts all feeding in the same up-draught but each species at its own level; Rock Nuthatches nest building; A Greyheaded Wagtail (possibly breeding) and 5 or 6 pairs of Blue Rock Thrushes.

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BIRDWATCHING IN KATHMANDU

By

R.L. Fleming, Ph.D.

Shanta Bhawan Hospital, Kathmandu
Nepal

An enthusiastic little group of birdwatchers in Kathmandu gather at 6.00 a.m. Saturday mornings beyond the Indian Embassy. American AID and United Mission personnel, Mrs. Stebbins, wife of the American Ambassador, Mr. Lain S. Bangdel, the noted Nepalese artist, and his wife; occasional visitors such as Dr. Charles V. Perrill of Vrindaban, U.P., and Mr. John Coapman of Tiger Tops Hotel, Nepal, have made up our group. We spend two hours looking at bird life in and near Rani Ban.

This "Queen's Forest" is a walled temple area (surrounded by cultivated fields) containing two hillocks, a small reforestation plot and a damp, grassy space between the wooded hills. A single Australian bottle brush tree often draws the purple sunbird while clusters of mistletoe in pear trees is the habitat of flowerpeckers. Two or three tall, dead trees near the first hill most certainly will offer a perch to drongos, mynas or doves, while the spring in the grassy field draws tree-pies, magpies, pond herons, thrushes and various birds, especially in dry weather.

Clusters of bamboo around the shrine on the second hill, furnish roosts for house and jungle crows which feed on the rice offered at the shrine. The robin flycatcher, fulvousbreasted woodpecker and yellowcheeked tit are usually around. Beyond is the forest proper, only about 300 yards long but the home of a goodly number of species, especially greyheaded and jungle mynas and bluthroat-ed barbets.

Dr. Austin L. Rand, of the Chicago Natural History Museum, once advised us to pick a certain area and visit it year after year to get acquainted with the seasonal movement of birds. In 1960 I chose Rani Ban and note last week was my 54th visit. Over this period I have listed 86 species, including the yellowbellied flowerpecker, common rubythroat, northern rufous woodpecker, and racket-tailed drongo each of which I have seen only once.

Our group visited Rani Ban on May 22nd, June 12th and 26th and again on the 27th of July. The birds we saw these four times and an estimated number of each species is as follows:

Name	22nd May	12th J u n e	26th	17th July
Barbet, Bluethroated	5	6	4	16
Crimsonthroated	1h*	1h*		1
Bulbul, Redvented		4	8	6
Crow, House	20	25	20	30
Jungle	3	2	4	8
Chloropses, Goldenfronted				1
Cuckoo, Indian	2h	2	2	
Koel	3	6	4	6
Dove, Red Turtle	3			
Rufous		1		
Spotted	4	3	3	1
Drongo, Ashybreasted	3	3	4	8
Black		2		

*h= heard

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<u>Name</u>	<u>22nd May</u>	<u>12th J u n e</u>	<u>26th</u>	<u>17th July</u>
Egret, Cattle		2		4
Small		2		
Flycatcher, Greyheaded		1		2
Robin			3	2
Verditer		2		3
Flowerpecker, Firebreasted	1	2	4	3
Plaincolored		2		3
Heron, Pond	3			2
Kite, Blackeared	2	2		
Kingfisher, Whitebreasted	1h	1h		2h
Magpie, Redbilled Blue	2		2	
Myna, Common	15	2	10	20
Greyheaded	3	4	2	15
Jungle	7	15	4	20
Minivet, Scarlet	2	3	6	4
Munia, Hodgson's		1		
Spotted			15	
Nuthatch, Cinnamonbreasted	1	2	2	
Velvetfronted				1
Owl, Hawk		1		1
Pigeon, Blue Rock	6	15	12	10
Robin, Magpie	6	7	7	12
Shrike, Blackheaded			1	
Sparrow, Tree	30	20	30	30
Swallow, Barn	2			
Striated	6	30	15	3
Swift, Nepal House	10	6		2
Sunbird, Purple			1	
Thrush, Orangeheaded Ground		2		
Tailor Bird, Burmese	4	3	8	6
Tit, Yellowcheeked	1	5	3	4
Grey		1		
Tree-pie, Himalayan	2			
Weaver, Baya	30h			20h
White-eye	4	6	6	10
Warbler, Greyheaded Flycatcher	3	2	1	5
Woodpecker, Fulvousbreasted	1	2	1	1
Northern Rufous			3	
Others:				
Hoopoe		1		
Cuckoo Shrike, Large				
Gray			2	

One will note quite a variation in numbers on some of the 53 species we have recorded. The second and third dates were before and after the beginning of the rains which in Kathmandu was the 14th of June this year. Mrs. D. Proud recorded the arrival of the purple sunbird several years on June 1st. Mrs. Roberts, of our group, reported it June 3rd. The Robin Flycatcher, only appeared after the rains began. The increase in numbers on the latter dates most certainly was due to young birds accompanying adults. We watched a party of four tailor birds on June 26th, two of which were juveniles. July 17th was a bright, sunny day and more birds were singing this morning than on any of the others all of which were partly cloudy.

We find it helpful to give each member a list of birds he is likely to see which may be checked at the time of sight or by using a notebook, to do it later and put down numbers. We probably see many of the same birds week after week but invariably there are one or two surprises, something we have seldom or never seen in Rani Ban.

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BIRD OBSERVATIONS BY AN ANGLER

By

E. W. Rambold

I am, primarily, an angler and cannot really claim to be a bird-watcher. Nevertheless, from my early days, I have taken a very keen interest in bird life and could be considered 'an observer', keeping a few notes and recording dates of arrival of sundry migrants and local migrants.

Among other records last fishing season I kept note of the birds I met with while actually fishing the Jamuna from Naushera up to Khalsi, about the first twenty miles from the time it leaves the Siwaliks. In this stretch it passes through the Siwaliks.

The first flight of duck, probably pintail, were seen southward bound on the 30th September. A week later, on the 6th October the first geese (grey lag) were also observed.

During the first week of October I saw a pair of Pallas's Fishing Eagles when fishing at Khalsi. This pair have been nesting in a silk cotton tree in the river bed between Khalsi and Dalapattar on the Chabrata Road for years. I first saw them in 1947 assuming they are the same pair. At any rate, the nest has been rebuilt in the same tree every year.

The osprey is another cold weather visitor on this stretch of river and this season I first noted them on 17th October. They stay right up to April. It is quite diverting to watch an osprey hunting his prey while we are spinning for mahseer. He patrols the river, hovers a bit and suddenly swoops down into the water on some unsuspecting fish. If he misses he rises again, stalls in mid air and 'shivers' the water out of his plumage. In February I saw one struggling in the water propelling himself with difficulty to the shore. I thought it was injured but on reaching the opposite bank it dragged itself out clutching a large fish in its talons, obviously too heavy for the bird to lift. Incidentally, during this time of the year I have frequently come across fish with only the heads eaten. Would this be the work of the osprey or could it perhaps be an otter?

When the Jamuna passes through the Siwaliks I have observed, not uncommonly, a large grey crested kingfisher not indicated in any of my bird books. He is a pirate, not catching his own fish but harassing the pied kingfisher into dropping his catch.

A real joy to the angler is that outstandingly beautiful little bird, the whitecapped redstart, generally accompanied by his less illustrious brother, the plumbeous redstart.

Another interesting bird on the Jamuna here is a large black-and-white duck present in very small numbers in flights of not more than eight birds, but usually in twos or threes. They only appear to be present between February and March. For many years I have not been able to identify them but from an illustration in a pamphlet issued by the Severn Wildfowl Trust in England I am of the opinion that they are shell-duck.

A pair of wall creepers is always to be seen on the wall face at the East Jamuna Canal headworks. I have only once seen one anywhere else.

Cormorants, river terns and blackbellied terns are continually

on the move and the little river stint is common. Flocks of pratin-coles invest the sandbanks above Tajewalla and that host of all fishermen, the pied kingfisher provides a pleasant morluu.

The spurwinged plover cannot be missed while the stone plover are occasionally seen among the rocks in the dry river bed.

Even if one does not catch any fish, a day out on the river is well rewarded as the birds go a long way to compensate the angler.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

a/ The Department of Zoology, University of Cambridge, U.K. propose to send out on a Liverhulme Scholarship a Mr. Bertram to do research under the direction of Dr. Salim Ali on a problem connected with the imitative capabilities of the Pahari Myna (Grackle). This myna is well known for its perfect imitation of human voice and speech. The problem is to investigate whether how and to what extent this ability is helpful to the bird in the wild state and why certain birds possess this ability and others not.

It will be necessary to study complete life-histories of Pahari Mynas in their natural habitats as well as in controlled aviary conditions. We have three subspecies of this myna in India. The first is in the tarai area, the second in Orissa, Bastar, etc., and the third, the smallest in Korala and Mysore.

We hope to be able to report on these researches from time to time.

CORRESPONDENCE :

Owl noises

I was most interested in Mrs. Thom's letter in the August issue on this subject. We in Sind seem to be haunted by the lack of owl noises! The Spotted Owlet is common enough here, but countless nights in gardens of rest houses have produced not a murmur from them. Recently however, we have heard this bird, a shrill sheack from an angry parent, and like Mrs. Thom, we have taped this call. It would be useful to have a collecting centre for tape recordings. The Collared Scops (Otus bakkamoena) is a far more elusive owl. John Wright once sat for half an hour in the shade of a tree, in a garden near Sukkur, before realizing that a pair of these little creatures had been studying him closely all the time from near the ends of a branch of the same tree! We have recently heard the call on several occasions near Hyderabad, exactly as described by Dr. Salim Ali. We have never seen the author of the call, except to establish that it is a small owl, but there can be little doubt of its identification. Attempts at recording this call have so far been unsuccessful. This owl never seems to wake up until it is quite dark.

A very intriguing owl is the Striated Scops (Otus brucei), calling all over the Ziarat Valley near Quetta, on a still moonlit night. Its call is described by John Wright in an article in this number, but we have been kicking ourselves ever since for not taking the tape recorder up there!

Turning to the larger owls, we have taped the Great Horned Owl several of which are present along a canal near Hyderabad. This is not of course its typical habitat, but the spoil banks are high, and there is a low rocky hill only a mile away. Its calls usually about sunset, with a quiet but remarkably far-carrying

and resonant wu-whuh, which records nicely. By rights, the Dusky Horned Owl should be commoner in the plains, but we have rarely seen them, and never yet heard the call, although the villagers seem to know it. We are now looking feverishly for the Brown Fish Owl. :

The only other owls we have seen are the Barn Owl, which caused considerable surprise when it flew out of a tomb on the desolate edges of the Rann of Kutch, and the three Shorteared Owls flushed near Jacobabad in broad daylight. The former is a familiar bird in England, whose sudden eerie shrieks terrify the townman on visits to the country, and its silent white ghostly form flitting over the hedge-tops in the moonlight only increases his alarm. The latter is chiefly a winter visitor both to England and to this sub-continent; although a few remain to breed in the marshes of eastern England, and can be seen hawking over the reed beds by day, being largely a diurnal bird.

At this stage one might reasonably digress onto nightjars. They are extremely difficult birds to distinguish by sight, an accomplishment I have not even attempted, although habitat and habits provide some clues. One sees them everywhere in Sind, flitting off the roads in the car's headlights in the nick of time (do they lie on the roads to take advantage of the warm surface in the cool night air?), but their identifying songs seem to be rarely heard. Sykes's Nightjar (Caprimulgus mahrattensis) is said to be the commonest one in Sind; but I have only once heard it -- a continuous soft purring note, barely audible at close range, yet no less audible a hundred yards away! The Common Indian Nightjar (C. asiaticus) was formerly virtually unknown in Sind, but I have heard its song from several parts of the delta, recently as far north as Hyderabad, so it would appear to be expanding its range, presumably northwards from Kutch. I need scarcely describe its well-known call, so well represented in Salim Ali's THE BOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS. The European Nightjar (C. europaeus) might be heard by those lucky enough to visit the Himalayas. It is the only one to occur in England, and I have many schoolboy memories of its night-long cheeping. It is considerably louder than Sykes's, and ~~is~~ is only interrupted by occasional very brief breaks, perhaps as the author regains breath, and by fascinating changes of key. Once heard, this bird can never be forgotten.

D.A. Holme
Lower Indus Project, P.O.Box 42
Hyderabad, West Pakistan

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What's this bird?

The 'crested kingfisher' [as I described it (p. 6, paragraph 6 of this issue), not knowing its proper name] is a large, solid looking bird about 15 inches in length, plumage grey on the back and lighter underneath, no prominent markings. Bill, not so long as the pied kingfisher. Very prominent crest erected when the bird calls a chic sound not unlike the whitebreasted kingfisher. Flight strong and low over the water. Does not catch its own prey but harries the pied kingfisher till it drops its catch -- have not seen it take other food such as grasshoppers etc.

Nests in holes in the river bank.

Locality: On the Jamuna where it passes through the Siwaliks -- probably height of Jamuna at this point is about 1200 ft. above sea level.

Dr. Salim Ali describes a Himalayan Pied Kingfisher with a prominent crest found over 2500 ft. in the Himalayas.

The bird I mention cannot be called 'pied' in colour and the locality is a good 15 miles from the first range of the Himalayas. Nevertheless could it be a Himalayan Pied Kingfisher with local variation in colour?

E. W. Ramble
c/o The Imperial Tobacco Co. of India
Saharanpur

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Breeding of the Little Egret in Kerala

Reference notes on the above by Sri Nanu Nair and Sri Neelakantan in the May and June issues of the Newsletter.

Sri B. Subbiah Pillai, a long-time member of the Bombay Natural History Society, wrote to me that his son had found a mixed breeding colony of Pond Herons and Night Herons at Melamuri, a place within Palghat town limits, and that he found also a single nest of the Little Egret among them. At my request Sri Subbiah Pillai asked his son to write a note on his observations and sent them to me. The note is given below*.

Between 1949 and 1958 I did a lot of birdwatching in and around Palghat but, apart from scattered colonies of breeding Pond Herons, found no positive evidence of nesting by others of the heron tribe. I suggested to Sri Subbiah Pillai that the Night Herons (and this pair of Little Egrets) must have begun to nest in Palghat after the inception of the Malampuzha project. He replied: 'Your conjecture that the Malampuzha reservoir and the availability of shallow water in the canals and fields during summer has encouraged water birds breeding in Kerala is quite correct and I completely agree with you.'

K.K. Neelakantan
Trivandrum

*Sri S. Balakrishnan, Mr. Subbiah Pillai's son writes:

"On 11.7.1965 I found a large colony of Pond and Night Herons with nests and nestlings in them. The ground underneath was strewn with the eggs and nests of both kinds of birds. This was due to the mischief of crows. The Pond Herons occupied several trees, but their bigger cousins, the Night Herons, were confined to three very large and shady tamarind trees. In one of these tamarind trees -- at Melamuri in the heart of Palghat town -- I noticed a single Little Egret on its nest in the company of several Night Herons. I actually saw the Little Egret carrying a stick in its beak and placing it on its nest and then standing on it." -- S. Balakrishnan, 18, Perumal Koil St., Fort, Coimbatore 1.

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Birdwatching in Patna

At Patna, I spent a few hours watching River Terns on the Ganges. Flocks of 7 to 8 used to just skim the water. I also noticed another remarkable fact. At a place where flocks after flocks of House Sparrows could be found during winter and summer, not one was seen this time. I learnt from the occupants that this was an annual phenomenon.

Mrs. Jamal Ara
Ranchi

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Common name of the owl Bubo bubo

The species Bubo bubo has been described in some books as Eagle Owl and in some as Great Horned Owl. Dr. Salim Ali describes it as Great Horned Owl but Hans Hvas in his BIRDS OF THE WORLD names it as Eagle Owl. He describes Bubo virginianus as Great Horned Owl. Encyclopaedia Britanica also describes Bubo bubo as Eagle Owl. Whistler makes no reference of Bubo bubo in his book.

I think that there is some confusion about the popular name of the species Bubo bubo. I request you to give some light on this problem in your Newsletter. A recent picture postcard issued by the Bombay Natural History Society also names Bubo bubo as the Great Horned Owl. I hope that you will make the matter clear.

Kameshwar Pal Singh
Narayan Bhawan, Station Road
Po-Barh Dist. Patna, Bihar

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Small displacement by ground nesting birds

Please refer to the Newsletter for Birdwatchers Vol. 5, Aug. 1965, last para on p. 7 of the note by S.D. Jayakar and H. Spurway.

This year in my compound a pair of Redwattled Lapwing lost its first clutch of eggs and renested laying two eggs only. As my gardener found the eggs inconvenient for ploughing, he moved them about 8 ft. away to the border of my field. Immediately after the rains came and grass began to grow. The eggs had already been accepted at the new site and the parent birds made no attempt to build a new foundation to it. The grass rapidly grew and the eggs were completely covered by it and yet the parents incubated in the overgrown grass which is unusual. Recently I found the eggs had hatched and the chicks were following their parents.

I have seen small displacement of eggs by parent birds among the following species: The Lesser Florican, Rain Quail, Bustard Quail, and the Pheasant-tailed Jacana.

R.S. Dharmakumarsinhji
Dil Bahar, Bhavnagar.

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Birds in a Delhi Garden

Here's another Britisher's observations, goaded on by receipt of the August Newsletter.

In our Delhi garden. During the first week of August a Common Myna being followed closely, in the air and on the ground by two immature Brahminys, and feeding them as if they were her own.

In June, Common and Brahminy Mynas and a Large Green Barbet skirmishing for the best holes in a Jacaranda tree, each eventually finding one that suited and nesting therein. In the last week of July, on the same evening, three tree-pies drinking from our birdbath at the same time, followed by six roseringed parakeets each of which waited his turn stacked in a guava tree. Today (13 August) three Brahminys bathing in the same bath, ousted by two Ramblers, ousted in turn by a Common Myna, while a Little Brown Dove and three White-eyes wait patiently for their turn to drink. In the first week of August, on two evenings running and for the first and only time a green pigeon sitting on the same twig ~~xxxx~~ atop a Ficus tree nibbling berries. At the end of June Magpie Robins feeding young in the hedge. At the end of July a Common Grey Hornbill making his annual fifteen minute stopover. At the

end of June a pair of Golden Orioles which, judging from their call pattern, were nesting two or three gardens away. A Blackheaded Oriole had visited us in March, as had Rosy Pastors, not seen again until last Sunday on the Delhi Golf Course. Redstarts were also March visitors. Although Redvented and Redwhiskered Bulbuls are with us all the time, the first ever Whitechecked visited in June for a day. Purple Sunbirds in non-breeding plumage and Tailor Birds are daily occurrences, as of course are our favourite Hoopoes. But pride of place goes to the regular evening foraging constitutional of a Grey Partridge whose mate, sad to say, seems to have fallen foul of someone.

By no means a comprehensive list of all sightings, but pleasurable.

Donald Erskine Crum
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NEWSLETTER

FOR BIRDWATCHERS

Volume 5—1965 October

A MADRAS NUMBER



NEWSLETTER
FOR
BIRDPATCHERS

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October 1965

CONTENTS

More notes from Madras. By R.A. Stewart Mellsuish	1
Notes and Comments	8

MORE NOTES FROM MADRAS

By

R.A. Stewart Mellsuish

In March's Newsletter I invited readers to cast an ornithological glance at the south-eastern seaboard of India, which had been largely ignored by recent birdwatchers' literature. Six months have passed since then, so I hope I can repeat the invitation now without importunacy. The rigmarole that follows is about Lake Pulicat.

This is a brackish lagoon on the Coromandel Coast a little north of Madras city, now lying partly in Madras State and partly in the Nellore district of Andhra Pradesh. It is separated from the sea on the east by a long strip of land called Sriharikota Island, along the western edge of which runs the Buckingham Canal. The sea flows in through a narrow breach in the coast at the southern tip of Sriharikota, and there is probably another inlet to the north of it near Durgarajupatnam. The lagoon itself is roughly 23 miles long from north to south and 13 miles wide at its widest point -- big enough to be marked fairly distinctly on most small-scale maps of India of the type that appear in popular atlases of the world. So when six years ago I first knew I was to be posted to Madras, then nothing more to me than the name of a remote East India Company factory severely denigrated by William Hickey, I resolved that on my arrival I should waste no time before exploring what was obviously the only important topographical feature of the coast near the city and a place that was very likely to be of interest to a birdwatcher. I was not disappointed: if it has yielded little of excitement in the way of breeding birds, it sports a comprehensive selection of winter migrants, some of which linger on through the summer months, and is much the most rewarding spot to visit regularly anywhere in the neighbourhood.

Apart from its birds, moreover, it is a place with a decided character of its own which grows on one as little by little it reveals the secrets of the different worlds it contains. It has plenty to offer the marine biologist; and the amateur, if not the professional, botanist; it has boats, and a small boat-building industry, and techniques of fishing to study; the village of Pulicat moreover has a mercantile history of no little interest. This is not the place to digress on these topics; but I wish it were, and I cannot avoid one illustration. Pulicat village, at the southern extremity of the lagoon where the sea gushes in between spits of sand, is a decayed port, with an ineffectual earthwork and moat built and once occupied by Dutchmen. To one looking now at that pitiful little rectangle of turf dotted with bellyache bushes and Madagascar periwinkle, the notion is absurd. How improbable they

seem, those stolid Protestant burghers in black hats packing up and down clinking guilders in their pockets, and running their thick thumbs down bills of lading! They have left little behind them: the vague shape of the fort; a cemetery, full of obelisks and cracked pavilions and slabs of stone sculptured with their names which women now smack wet saris on; and a memory of wealthy, better days among the Muslims they traded with, and who still live today in the ruins of once prosperous town houses. Their columniated verandas are now open to the rains, in streets that evoke recollections of Herculaneum and Pompeii. But when a place has a past, however vague its present traces, it is the owner of a personality and a dignity that the vast mass of anonymous South Indian villages and towns utterly lack.

The lake's most conspicuous delight for the birdwatcher is sufficiently exoteric for even the layman to enjoy : this is the groups of flamingo whose presence somewhere on the lake can be almost guaranteed at any time of the year, winter or summer. It is true that even in winter, when the numbers are greater, the shallows in which they congregate extend so far that it is easy to miss them by inspecting the wrong part of the lake, or by not staying there long enough, and so go away disappointed, but the only months of the year that I have not recorded flamingo there are March and August, and this means very little, for I have many records for February and at least one for March, and I have never been to the lake in August. The signs are that the species, Phoenicopterus roseus, is represented all the year round by small parties of non-breeding birds -- some are clearly immature, having grey beaks and plumage -- and that these are regularly joined in the winter by migrants from the Rann of Kutch or some other perhaps unknown Asiatic breeding-colony. I have never seen more than a thousand birds, but never less than eighty or a hundred. In the winter when it is wet they are extremely mobile, either because their food and suitable shallows to feed in are more widely dispersed or because their familiar haunts are no longer shallow enough for them, and they can be seen outside the immediate vicinity of the lake. Indeed, all the way along the coast both to the north and to the south of Madras there are shallow brackish and salt lagoons just behind the shore and some of these occasionally attract flamingo, though I have yet to meet anyone else who has ever noticed them. I have seen them at Mahabalipuram, flying about near the PWD bungalow, and within two hundred yards of the main road from Madras to Mahabalipuram, near Kelambakkam.

Everything is slightly unreal about a day when flamingoes are seen. In their branch of creation they are the ultimate absurdity, like stick-insects in theirs. They belong to the world of mock turtles, dodos, and the Queen of Hearts' exotic game of croquet. It is not however the flamingoes which make one return again to the lake, in all weathers, to plod through its glaucous shallows in the horizontal rains of November or to sail out to its remoter sand-dunes under a sun, as the heralds called it, 'in its splendour'. Its primary and abiding interest lies in its being a convenient kind of enclosure or frame within which it is feasible to build up a coherent picture of the population and movements of the water-birds of south-eastern India. No such picture can be obtained by sporadic examinations of scattered waters and random strips of coast, useful though these undoubtedly are, and often spectacular. In the long run there is no substitute for the painstaking, methodical working of a manageable area with which one can become, in time and with patience, really familiar. I have not worked Pulicat either painstakingly or methodically, far from it, but I am sure the aim

of so doing is a sound one to have in view and if every bird-watcher in India set about the study of the birds of a clearly defined area of country, even if it was only his back garden, and eventually published his conclusions in a bulletin like the Newsletter, we should all begin to know a little bit more about the wild life of this country.

Now that I have reached this sententious climax, the proper proceeding is for me to regurgitate an indigestible list of the species I have seen at Pulicat, with earnest little comments on them. (Commonly met with in small parties of 20-30 on saltings off Annamalaichcheri, October-March.) This approach to ornithological writing is often necessary and wholly justified, but as this article is not a systematic report I shall not adopt it here. Something less formal is called for. To achieve this, I propose to give a narrative account of what is to be seen on a typical passage up the middle of the lake. We shall take a small dinghy out from Pulicat village, and sail upon its waters.

North of the village is a bulge of land, where grey and golden plover and occasionally yellow-wattled lapwing appear in winter, and north of this again, the channel running in from the sea. It is from this point on the southern shore that we embark to run up the lagoon. Over the channel I have often seen a pair of white-bellied sea-eagles, and imagine their preference for this part of the lake is the concentration of fish which must here pass through a narrow bottleneck. A fortnight ago I visited a little islet near the sea end of the channel, to which these eagles often appear to fly, hoping I might find their nest in a cluster of trees there. I was disappointed : the trees were small and unsuitable : yellow-wattled lapwing were the only birds breeding there; but there were four sea-snake skeletons there which suggested that some large bird or birds had used the island as a secluded spot for a meal. In the winter another bird which can generally be seen gorging itself on the banks of this channel is the osprey, which is a fine bird to see commonly.

Heading north-west we pass up the narrow southern finger of the lake towards more open water. It is shoally, and large stretches of water are only ankle deep, but there is a deeper channel close in to Sriharikota and we make good progress. We soon draw near two stones sticking vertically out of the water a yard apart. As for the next three or four hours' sailing these are the firmest and steadiest objects we shall find we moor alongside one and clamber out. The water here is waist-deep and the stones are just the right height to prop a telescope on. We can thus examine at leisure the many birds assembled in groups and dotted about in the shallows. Fortunately it is morning and they are down sun of us. In the evening everything on the mud will be in black silhouette and barely discernible. Quite near, and entirely unconcerned at our approach, are the lagoon's familiar occupants : flamingoes, a few painted storks (rarely are there many of these -- fifty or sixty is the most I have ever seen together), egrets, the odd reef heron in its ashy-grey plumage, grey herons and some pelicans. With luck, for they are not altogether common; a row of spoonbill. Once, last October, to my intense delight, when I was walking out towards these storks after a young flamingo with a broken leg, somebody let off a bang, a gun I suppose; and among the multitude of far-off birds which rose in alarm and filled the sky above Masumani Lock with their wings I noticed ten birds in a close group that flut-tered off like butterflies, white with black wingtips. They were avocets. These delicately built and extremely graceful birds seem to be decidedly uncommon in the south of India. I have only seen them this once near Madras and once near Vijayawada. Last October's birds did not stay at Pulicat for the winter: my notes go on, 'eventually a row of rowdy fisher-women put them up, and they flew most beautifully and purposefully to the east, as if

they would not come back.' This was on the 15th. I was paddling in the lake again on the 17th and the 18th and no avocets were to be seen.

The terns I mentioned are also familiars. Gullbilled, whiskered, and Caspian are regulars, all the year round; crested, both lesser and the larger kind, seem only to winter there; about little terns I am still uncertain, for until I went out this year into the deeper waters of the lagoon no little tern had come near me. They were about, though sparingly, in May, June and July. Up at Tada two years running there has been a noisy pair of common terns(?).

It is also worth putting the telescope on the smaller birds at this point, for although we are looking over ankle-deep water, and not the flats of exposed water that the smaller waders like to run about on, there are a few knobs of mud sticking up out of the water here and there, and some mounds of mollusc shells waiting to be loaded on to boats as the raw material of the chunan industry, on which the smaller species sometimes rest, and they deserve to be examined. It is very easy to pass over a pack of small birds with some lazy generalization: 'redshank, mostly'; or 'nothing but little stint'. This is always a mistake, though. However tiny and dull and brown these packs should be scrutinized carefully. They cannot always be, because they are often fidgeting about too fast or are scattered about over a lot of mud the same colour as themselves; or they are too far away; but whenever close observation is possible it is very often rewarding. My latest reward of this sort was five terek sandpipers, seen a couple of hundred yards from these stones, amongst redshank, grey plover and greenshank. I walked up very close to them. 'The terek were the last to be flushed ... though they were joined by a new redshank a moment before they rose. Could easily see their slightly upcurved beaks and their orange-red legs. But first spotted because of their stooping, hunched posture ...' The distinctive carriage or posture of birds is often a useful pointer to their identity: not that the terek poses much of an identification problem, once it is realized that Henry's plate in A GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF CEYLON shows the legs much yellower and the bill more upcurved than they usually look in the field, but it is satisfying to spot a small brown blob running along and to feel, before putting glasses on to it, by its stance alone, that it is what it is. Observers elsewhere in India may scoff at excitement over a bird they doubtless regard as ordinary, but they are not easy to see in the south, and I had only found one single bird at Pulicat before, in January. This second record was in May.

Moving on now, after a mug of hot coffee, we find that the wind has freshened and backed a little. The lagoon is broadening out and there are soon waves: not serious ones, but they make it impossible to use field glasses, or a telescope effectively. Some would say that a telescope can never be used effectively; they regard it as a diabolical tool, as if it were some unreliable and fractious piece of antiquated ordnance, an arquebuse which might explode at any minute in the breach, and they tie themselves in the most distressing knots trying to use it. First they simply hang it out in front of them and wave it about. Then, trying to steady it with one hand they close up one of the drawers which should always be fully open. Frustrated, they look around for a tree or a post. There never are trees or posts. They ask to borrow your head, but you cannot keep still because they are nearly pushing you over and you have to struggle to retain your balance. In despair they fling themselves down on their stomachs on the sand, which is wet. This position tests them too much, so they roll over on to their backs and pivot through 180 degrees on their bottoms. Then begins a fascinating interchange of knees and grips and

eyes and attempts to make use of the leather sling, which nearly throttles them. By this time the birds they want to examine have flown far away, and they abandon the attempt, muttering, disgruntlement about the design of the instrument being poor. The other day when I told a friend of mine, otherwise instinct with wisdom and good sense, what great pleasure and satisfaction a telescope offered; he typified the attitude of the vanquished tyro by replying, sedately, 'Yes, I can see that it may be fun to look down that thing and see a grey circle wobbling about.' While I will readily admit that a telescope certainly can be trying, especially if it is called upon to do what it is not supposed to do, such as to show you the colour of a Temminck's stint's legs in flight, and while I am as good as anyone at fidgeting about before I can see through one comfortably, it is not an instrument to despise, and is frequently of the greatest usefulness.

In a dinghy rocking about in the water it is at its least effective, though, and it is fortunate that on the open deeper part of the lake at Pulicat there is little to see, certainly in summer-time. A curlew will probably pass over. On 22 May a dozen blacktailed godwit hurried past us; and a handful of little terns could be seen dropping into the water now and then after fish. One can relax for an hour or two, and admire the great sky and listen to the gurgling of the waves. To the east and west the land has become a distant streak of sand capped by a hairy line of palmyras and casuarinas. Faintly in the distance lie the hills of Nagalapuram, and half way up the abrupt eastern scrap hangs a pale smoke from a scrub fire.

It is not long now before the horizon to the north, which has been empty for hours except for a few brown sails, sprouts a tree; then, an islet, with poles, nets, and men in the water. It is at this point that a choice of route can be made. On a short two- or three-day expedition in a small boat there are three main possibilities: one is to go north-east and put ashore on the lakeward coast of Sriharikota near Beripeta, another is to go straight ahead to the islands of Irakum and Venadu, and the third is to make for Tada at the north-western corner of the lake.

Beripeta is on the western side of Sriharikota at the point where it is 2 or 3 miles wide. The island is a dominion of the forest administration, and a lot of firewood is collected and sent down to Madras by boat on the Buckingham Canal. To carry wood easily across the island a narrow gauge railway has been built on which wagons are pushed by sweating navvies. I have only been there once, in 1961, and had the privilege of being installed in a gorgeous inspection wagon with a silver-painted canopy and pushed the whole length of the line and back. No obstacle was allowed to bar our triumphal progress, and other trucks along the line in the process of being loaded with fag-gots had to be hastily unloaded and lifted off the rails in front of us. At the seaward end of the line is a dilapidated forest bungalow overlooking sand-dunes. The woods and glades we passed through hold promise for the naturalist, but unfortunately I have not been back again yet to investigate it more thoroughly.

The route due north, to Irakum and Venadu, is one I have recently taken twice, once at the end of May and once a fortnight ago. I had been flown low over these islands in a light aeroplane, and they looked like bleak desert, with only a few palmyras on them and one or two clusters of huts, which I underestimated. I resolved this summer to explore them, full of dreams of breeding colonies of terns and other delights.

The southern end of the southernmost of the two islands, Irakum, is indeed a sandy negation, but there is a village very near it full of liquor-stills and disturbance. On the first of my trips there my friends and I arrived at dusk and stayed the night on the open beach. Soon after it grew light I walked about on the sands and nearly crushed some eggs under foot. They were four, about $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches long and an inch wide, a light sandy-olive colour blotched mostly at the wider end with sepia or black, and they sat with their narrow ends inwards in a shallow dent in the sand ringed half-heartedly with seven or eight flakes of weathered brick and a fragment of shell. These looked too large to be owned by the pair of small plover which had drawn me to the area, and I thought they probably belonged to the redwattled lapwing that had been calling the previous evening, but it was odd that these birds, if they were the owners, were now nowhere to be seen or heard. They usually make a frantic noise if one enters their territory. Then I remembered that last year in England I had very nearly trodden on a similar clutch and these had also seemed too big to belong to the ringed plover that settled down on them a little later. So I set about finding the plovers on Irakum, supposing they would turn out to be Kentish. This proposal was abruptly checked, however, by an irruption of the local villagers. The price to pay, on this occasion, for landing on an un-desert island was to be invested by fifty or more exceedingly tough and loud-mouthed women who asserted, with a lot of gesticulation and rhetoric, that we had taken unmentionable liberties with two of their number on the moonlit beach the night before. So we had to move on hastily, without our breakfast, and I still do not know what plovers laid those eggs.

The second expedition, still very fresh in my memory, was supposed to be to Vonadu, which is the bigger of the islands and lies about half a mile to the north of Irakum, divided from it by a narrow channel. The crew of the boat reached the isle of Irakum in the dark, tired of being a crew, and decided that as we were lunatics and could not possibly tell one island from another they might as well beach us on the northern tip of Irakum. This was not however as disagreeable as we feared. We were not molested by shrieking hags, and found the country itself less dreary than to the south. There was a greater variety of trees, a few green paddy-fields, and some gullies full of fresh water. Near our camp was a small oval lagoon, barely four hundred yards long, linked to the main waters by only a narrow inlet. Standing in this was a party of seventy flamingo, which allowed us to get within a hundred yards of them. On the sand and mud fringing the lagoon were some scattered sand plover. The birds I looked at closely were only in partial summer plumage -- the light chestnut feathers on the chest did not meet to form an unbroken band. As usual, most were lesser, but one or two were very much bigger and were probably large, *leschenaultii*. One other bird amongst them caught my attention and was pleasing to see because I had not spotted one of its kind before at Pulicat. At first sight it was a dunlin: bigger than the sand plover, too plump and short in the leg for a bird of the *Tringine* genus, holding its head tight down on its shoulders and never bobbing up and down as sandpipers do. The black bill was long and curved downwards slightly. It had a creamy white supercilium, and greyish brown feathers on the head, back, wings and on the chest. I soon put it up to see its wing and tail pattern in flight, but was distracted by another similar bird that joined it in the air and they both settled too soon for me. The second time they rose and raced back and forth low over the water they showed conclusively their white upper tail feathers. They were curlew-sandpipers, loitering through the summer and foregoing their proper chestnut breeding plumage. In the stir of their flush-

ing two great stone plovers rose, and a lone marsh sandpiper, too, bringing back memories of wet winter days on the estuary at Tada when acres of flooded grassland are alive with hundreds of these delicate and beautiful creatures.

This was not the end of Irakum's offerings on this occasion. A solitary Indian courser ran across in front of us as we walked towards the shore, and while we were crossing some ploughed fields five small passerine birds flew down on to a bund close in front of us that I am still nowhere near unravelling. It sometimes happens to the inexperienced watcher that a bird appears which is absolutely unaccountable, and which cannot even be allotted to a family, let alone specified. At times one's puzzlement is due to ignorance or unfamiliarity with the birds that may frequent a given area; at others, simply dim-wittedness. Perhaps a reader of the Newsletter will put me to shame next month by explaining these birds; but in six years plodding around Madras I have never seen or thought I have seen anything like them. At first the flash of white on their rumps as they landed reminded me of wheatears, only as they settled I saw that their black tails were a good deal longer and they held them downwards, touching the ground behind them. The colour of the head and upper parts was murrey, almost plum. This faded into a paler sandy colour underneath and to a darker brown or black at the fore-edge of the folded wing and on the primaries. The bills were very short, not unlike a pratincole's in shape, and their legs were pale buff. Their build was slender, their stance upright. This description is lamentable, I fear, but I had only two or three seconds to take everything in, barely time to focus my glasses on them, before they were in the air again and away, beyond hope of pursuit. They flew with a fairly fast wing-beat in scallops like pipits or finches, rising to about twenty feet. Since that brief moment I have spent a long time thumbing through books, and wondering, and staring at the ridiculous little sketches I made on the spot, and wondering again, but no light has dawned yet, and it probably never will.

On our imaginary cruise up the lake we have the leisure to go on now to Venadu, but until I have been there myself I can say nothing useful about it. I only know that when the water level is low it is not necessary to cross the channel by boat. There is a firm track between the two islands which is easy going and where the water is nowhere more than knee-deep. Venadu looks from a distance much more heavily overgrown with vegetation than Irakum, and probably harbours more woodland species of birds than its southern neighbour.

The third route a boat can profitably take, to the north-western corner of the lake off Tada, leads one to the fresher waters at the mouths of the river Kalangi, the biggest of the streams which flood the lagoon in the rainy months. The story of the bird life of this deltaic zone, and of the miles of mud and bog that stretch beyond across the northern fringe of the lake can, I think, safely wait for a later issue of this bulletin; so we will leave the dinghy beached on the shell banks at Nadakadikuppam, isle of Irakum, and return another day.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

This issue is unusual in that it carries a single article. It was thought necessary to print it as a whole. Discursive articles of this type based on meticulous observation are what this Newsletter really wants to present. The editor will welcome your comments on this month's production.

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NEWSLETTER

FOR BIRDWATCHERS

Volume 5—1965 November



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BIRDWATCHERS

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CONTENTS

My survey of the crow population of Khandala village. By Rev. A. Navarro, S.J.	1
Bird Doctoring. By S.V. Nilakanta	4
Some more birds in our Juhu garden. By Mrs. Leela Nilakanta	5
Review:	
THE YOUNG SPECIALIST LOOKS AT BIRDS. (L.F.)	7
Notes and Comments	7
Correspondence:	

Roosting habits of the Coppersmith. By T.V. Jose (p. 8). Nest of the Tailor Bird. By Sumedha Nilakanta (p. 8). Birdwatching in British Columbia, Canada. By Tom J. Roberts (p. 8). Birdwatching in Nagaland. By Pratap Singh, I.P.S. (p. 8). Spotted Owlets. By Nandan Nilakanta (p. 9)

MY SURVEY OF THE CROW POPULATION OF
KHANDALA VILLAGE

By

Rev. A. Navarro, S.J.

Every lover of the Bombay-Poona road knows that Khandala village is situated at the top of the Khandala Ghats. For well over a quarter of a century I have been to our holiday-home fairly regularly every year. This place is called St. Xavier's Villa, which faces directly the Khandala village above mentioned. From the south of St. Xavier's Villa we have an open and imposing view of the Duke's Nose Ravine down to the plains. To the right side of it you see, as it were before your feet, what was known before 1928 and is still called today the "Old Reversing Station" Hill. From the top of this hill facing south two views greet the observer: part of the Duke's Nose Ravine to the left and a full view of the Plains of Kampoli to the right.

Now to the left of St. Xavier's Villa, as you look southward, stands Duke's Nose Hill separated by a shallow depression from the range of the Sausage Hills. Between the two hills a high-power line runs down to Khandala Hotel through St. Xavier's Villa and then onward to the top of the Reversing Station Hill right down to the plains. This then is the topography of the surroundings with St. Xavier's Villa as our point of departure for the following observations of the crow population of Khandala village. With this picture in mind it should not be difficult to the ethnologist to follow the results of my examination.

For quite a long time have I noticed on many evenings a slow but steady flock of the common House Crow (Corvus splendens) coming from somewhere and perching for long periods on the wires of the

pylons that stand along the property of the Villa and further. After a rest they went down apparently to the plains. Since this same procedure was repeated day after day, at exactly the same time and in the same leisurely manner, it aroused my curiosity. I finally decided to investigate the points that challenged me, as they might challenge any bird-lover: (1) from where were the crows coming; (2) why did they stop at St. Xavier's Villa; (3) whence were they going to?

With the assistance of some of my student-friends I set out on methodical observations of these common House Crows. Our observations would focus on the direction from where the crows were coming. We watched and watched. On the sixth day of our observations I came to the conclusion that the crows that were gathering late in the evening at St. Xavier's Villa were the same crows that had been mercifully carrying out the job of scavenging the Khandala village throughout the long day.

From the end of the Sausage Hills range, as you draw an imaginary line over the Khandala railway tract to the Poona motor road down to the edge of the Shivaji Ravine, we made the following observations. We observed that the crows from the right side of the line were flying across towards or in the direction of Lonavla, and from the left side of the line they were winging their way towards the direction of St. Xavier's Villa.

Then I visualized that we were dealing with a large flock (or colony) of crows that was attached to a definite area, viz. Khandala; thus there seemed the possibility of making a census of the crow population of Khandala village.

There was at that time a crow of Kathkaris employed in our Villa. So one evening I asked them if they knew where these House Crows were coming from and where they were going to. The first part of the question they could not answer with any certainty, but of the second part they said that the crows were going to roost in the Plains of Kampoli somewhere near the main motor road.

Therefore one more intriguing puzzle had to be solved and carefully observed, whether the crows were really roosting at the Plains of Kampoli. I was able to follow the route of this colony of crows to the spot indicated in a general way by the Kathkaris. If the exact spot could not be located, then at least the area was pinpointed.

Then in a flash I remembered that on more than one occasion I had observed several crow nests in that locality. And in my ramblings through the hills and dales of Khandala I can say with knowledge that I have never seen the House Crow breeding in Khandala, even when the breeding season coincided with my holiday there. So I am drawn to the conclusion that crows breed near their roosting grounds more often than near their feeding grounds, even when the facts seem to indicate the contrary.

Hence I was fully convinced that Khandala village was the feeding ground of this rather large colony of crows that we were closely observing and that Kampoli, and not Khandala, was their roosting field. So there remains the last and only point of our quest: to attempt and see if it is really possible to count their numbers.

Now the fact that they invariably stopped at the Villa was a clear indication that they made this Villa a sort of halting station to make sure of the proper time they intended to reach their roosting ground. The length of the line along which they used to perch must have been roughly in the vicinity of 200 yards. Late in the evening, about an hour before sunset, the first crow used to arrive at the wires. After a

time a small flock of about 25 to 30 of them would foregather in the same place. From their antics and playfulness, they seemed in a happy mood and in no hurry to go off. They would jokingly peck at one another and indulge in a merry ring of acrobatics, springing off the wires and returning once more, till the time of departure they instinctively felt had arrived. The earlier groups would spend more time in corvine merriment and amusement, in mutual pecking and banter; the later groups quite as obviously spent less time in community fun as the sun leisurely dipped into the horizon.

The warning bell for their descent was sounded when 2 or 3 of them, presumably the more experienced of the seniors, would suddenly make a dash for the ravine; then the rest of the contingent would follow at leisurely speed. The earlier group at times enjoyed a second halt at the Reversing Station Hill. But once this movement of the crows had started in processional flotilla formation, the pylon wires were seldom seen without a corvine occupant, though that respite lasted but for a short time. The formation of these groups was never large; they arrived in small groups; at other times they would arrive in a stream of individuals following one another, but never in the follow-the-leader fashion or in Indian file. House Crows are an easy-going and leisurely class all their own.

If, at times, they did arrive in larger numbers than usual, they would break up into two or three smaller groups; they do not seem to enjoy the herd instinct or the psychological mob, but rather the small village mentality. But their departure down to the Ravine on their way to the plains of Kampoli was usually accompanied with a noisy cawing cacophony. The very latest arrivals used to fly over the Villa without stopping at all, following in the wake and along the same trail of those who had left before. From St. Xavier's Villa up to the Reversing Station Hill they usually used to fly more or less in group formation; as they advanced towards the plains, the groups would disintegrate and each individual would go homing his own way.

Hence there was ample time at our disposal to count them. After I had counted them myself for five or six days in succession, I asked some of my friends to do the same for another three days. Another party volunteered to do the counting of these crows for another three days. At the end of these three sets of counting we gathered all our readings and found that all of them tallied more or less, without any abnormal discrepancy. No party counted less than 246 crows and none more than 252. Therefore our final computation of the population of crows of Khandala village in May 1948 we could confidently fix at 250 crows!

Happy at this calculation, I now wanted to see how the reverse process would show, i.e. to observe these House Crows on their way back to their feeding grounds. And I was not a little intrigued to find that it was a different way. This is what I observed.

A little time before sunrise the first comers from the plains could be seen coming up, one after another. This time it was not a "float" upwards, but a flight decidedly faster and more decisive. What was more, they did not halt or stop anywhere, but made for their objective "as the crow flies"! Some of them came up over the Villa, while others from the Reversing Station Hill were making a bee-line for their feeding ground. The flight from their feeding ground to their roosting habitat must be roughly three miles as the crow flies.

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BIRD DOCTORING

By

S. V. Nilakanta

It was Sunday, 20th December 1964, an important day for the Field Club of Birdwatchers was having its Annual General Body Meeting. Being a Sunday morning, I happened to stroll along the Juhu beach. Looking seawards, I noticed a bird fly -ing shorewards at right angles to the shore line. The bird was being chased by a number of crows. At first it appeared that the crows were bullying a tern into dropping its hard earned catch. As the flight of the smaller bird was very feeble and as it was dropping in altitude, I ran along the beach to intercept its line of flight and with the idea of having as close a look as possible. The bird, however, was so exhausted that it could not maintain flying speed and dropped to a height of four feet from the ground and was caught by me in mid air!

Even as I caught it, I realized that the bird was a cuckoo. It was taken home and kept under a basket and when it had rested a little was given water by force feeding. At this time an attempt was made to positively identify the bird. The first impression was to place it as the Common Hawk-Cuckoo Cuculus varius. The Common Hawk-Cuckoo, in my opinion, cannot be called at all common in the gardens of Bombay. Certainly, I had no previous experience of holding any cuckoo in the hand. On referring to various books the bird was able to answer to the descriptions of the Indian Cuckoo C. microp-terus as well as to the Cuckoo C. canorus.

Personally, I like to think that the bird was coming in from a distant land and the crows, ever ready to spot a stranger, who did not understand the locality, fell upon it. That happens to so many Pied Crested Cuckoos that come to this crow infested shore. Local birds know the ways of crows and are usually able to take care of themselves but not the tired stranger.

The bird was then left in the aviary of Capt. Bhandarkar. It soon climbed up into the more sheltered portion of a tree in the aviary. A pair of Green Munias were very greatly agitated by the presence of this 'hawk'. Although they flitted from end to end of their cage, they ever came closer and closer to the new bird and within an hour knew that it was absolutely harmless.

All efforts to feed the cuckoo resulted in failure. The feathers of the bird had lost their gloss and were thoroughly unkept. The fine markings and spots on individual feathers did not properly align to give a true barred effect. In spite of careful examination, no broken bones or external injury could be seen. The bird made no effort at any time to preen itself. As healthy birds seem to preen themselves so actively in the sun, the lack of performing this important function, may have indicated the extreme deterioration of its condition.

Next day the bird was returned to me in a smaller and comfortable cage. The bird appeared to be in a comma and died that night. Its body had wasted away to a pitiful bundle of skin and bones.

Early this September, one evening, Mr. Zafar Futehally brought me a young Gullbilled Tern. Again crows had been harrasing it. The bird appeared to be uninjured and alort although it made no effort to peck or get away from the hand. A cage was borrowed and the bird housed in it. Some water was given to the bird. Later on, an Adoxolin vitamin

capsule was given. The bird always sat on the floor of the cage and held itself perfectly horizontal. Its feathers were in fine shape but it never preened them.

In the next few days the bird was fed small doses of hard boiled eggs, cod liver oil, bread, boiled rice and vitamin capsules. After two days of this the feathers on the head and throat became wet and remained wet. The next two days saw further deterioration of feather condition, after which the bird died.

In nature the bird would have been exposed to the monsoon wind and rain. Gulls and terns are also exposed to the blazing sun. Perhaps, in addition to a simulated balanced diet, I should have simulated natural environments by keeping the cage outdoors. But why did the bird not preen its feathers? Does the bird's oil gland work only when it is exposed to sunlight?

Some years ago another Gullbilled Tern was brought to me. This bird had been caught by a dog on the beach. This incident was following a storm during the previous night. This bird was practically unhurt and showed some spirit when handled. As efforts to give food and water failed, it was suggested by Capt. Bhandarkar that we should leave it in the Tulsi Lake area. We did this after the feathers were dry. Even after being released, the bird did not fly but waddled around on its legs. We stood around to keep the crows away. After a few minutes of this exercise, the bird took off slowly and flew straight to the lake. There it alighted on the very edge and drank water again and again. As soon as its thirst was quenched it preened its feathers thoroughly. It was a pity that I had not banded the bird.

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SOME MORE BIRDS IN OUR JUHU GARDEN

By

Mrs. Leela Nilakanta

Last July 1964, I had written a short note in our Newsletter about some species of birds seen in our garden. Every year some new species make an appearance and some old friends disappoint us by their absence. Every time I see a new bird in our garden, I compare notes with my friend, Mrs. Laeeq Futchally, to see if I was more favoured than she was. Thus when a crow-pheasant was observed among our trees, I felt that scores were evening out, though my bird was a raggedy specimen compared to the sleek one she had in her garden.

Little did I realize what a chain reaction was to come about with the appearance of this bird. We have numerous tailor birds in our garden and several broods have been successfully hatched. I felt that the crow-pheasant would act as a deterrent to this but as far as I could observe, this bird was only interested in hopping from branch to branch of our peepul tree. But my fears proved to be correct as there was a marked decline in the population of the tailor birds.

We have a bush of the Rangoon Creeper (Quisqualis indica) just outside our verandah. When it is cascading with flowers, it is a beautiful sight. Flowers are usually absent in the monsoon season and the leaves look damaged. This damage was caused by horrible, large caterpillars, which have been getting fewer in the last few years, due to the diligent search and destruction by our tailor birds. But this year, due to the lesser number of tailor birds about, the caterpillars have increased in number and there are fewer flowers.

So, after all, the crow-pheasant did not prove to be a welcome addition to the bird-life of our garden and I do not regret its departure.

Not all birds are unwelcome. Early one morning, this summer, we heard a shrill piping similar to the call of sunbirds but yet different. So we investigate. We saw a fiery streak flitting into our tamarind tree. My husband identified it as a kingfisher - or though smaller than the Common Kingfisher. From the tamarind tree it went to a small garden pond in the house opposite ours. I kept close watch but never managed to catch more than a glimpse in the few days it was with us. But one evening when I was away from home, my husband was sitting in the garden with Mr. Zafar Futehally when this bird flew into a bush close to them and they were able to observe it for a long time. I am hoping that it will come again and that I will be able to see it too. It has been identified positively as a Threotoed Kingfisher, Ceyx orithacus!

In May, it being the dry season, the grass growing around Juhu aerodrome and the surrounding wet regions was burnt and this probably was the cause for a beautiful bird visiting us. One morning when I opened the back door, a bird scuttled away. It looked like a chicken and I investigated. I could not see it but I could hear it clucking. So I kept watch and finally managed to get a good look at it. I referred to Dr. Salim Ali's THE BOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS, and thought that it could be a Painted Snipe. But when my husband saw it that evening, he identified it as one of the rails!

Later on it became very familiar, just like the domestic chicken I had thought it to be. In fact my cook called it in Tamil Kozhi which means a fowl. It was always moving through the hedge and along the hedge. When it was feeding just outside our kitchen window or under the peepul tree, I worried lest that the cat that was about should harm it but it seemed to be able to take good care of itself.

One of its favourite haunts was the shelter under a lantana bush. By hiding inside this bush, my husband was able to observe it from a distance of two feet. Whenever anyone approached it, it used to scurry for safety to this lantana bush. So even when he was under the bush, when I approached it, it ran for shelter to this bush. Later on my husband was able to identify it positively with the help of skins at the Bombay Natural History Society, as a Banded Crake, Rallina eurizonoides. This bird has vanished from our garden, probably on the restoration of its natural habitat, after the onset of the monsoon.

A few evenings ago, we were sitting in the garden and I was gazing skywards at all the birds flying home. Suddenly I noticed a really huge bird hovering round a coconut tree and settling on a frond of it. I had not seen such a huge bird so close to the roof-top and asked my husband to investigate. It was a Whitebacked Vulture. Quite soon, it had attracted the attention of all the crows in the neighbourhood and they came swooping close to it. One or two of them even sat on the same frond but the vulture took no notice of them. The Pariah Kite that also belongs to this neighbourhood, joined the fray now and dive-bombed it several times but to no avail.

One crow, bolder than the rest, actually sat on the back of the vulture and pecked it for what it was worth, again to no avail. The vulture edged closer to the trunk of the tree and settled down for the night. It was still there next morning and flew off only when the sun was very hot and the warm currents of air were favourable for its take-off.

Pond Herons have taken to roosting on the trees around our house. Spotted Owlets are very vociferous. Last year they had nested in the banyan tree near our house and this year, they have their nest on a topless coconut tree across the

road. Parakeets and Mynas have an argument all day long and what with the noise they and the crows make between them, I am afraid that I will not be able to hear the call of any new visitors to our garden.

REVIEWS

THE YOUNG SPECIALIST LOOKS AT BIRDS. By Heinrich Fricling. Translated and adapted by Winwood Reade. Illustrated by E. Haferkorn, and others. pp. 122. London. Burke. Price

This book is one of a series of small, beautifully illustrated and scientifically accurate handbooks which are meant to enable the youngster to painlessly learn the fundamentals of any natural-history subject which attracts him. Among the other titles in the series; for instance, are The Young Specialist looks at the Weather, Horses, Pond-life, Wild Flowers, Molluscs. Thus a slight curiosity can, with the help of the right one of these books, be developed into a lasting hobby or even, with ambition, into a serious scientific interest.

The purpose of the volume on Birds is to help in the identification of birds, neither more nor less. It seems to me, but perhaps this only shows my ignorance, that the birds of Europe must be more difficult to identify than ours. There seems to be a high proportion of small brown birds with no distinguishing marks. If this book can teach the young birdwatchers to sort out by species the multitude of identical-looking brown birds it will have done a remarkable job. In attempting this the two-line notes on the bird's habitat and behaviour might prove to be almost as useful as the really superlative coloured illustrations. The user of this book would have to spend a half hour initially in order to familiarize himself with the Key to the Identification Tables. A truly Germanic System of numbering each species according to its characteristics and then using the numbers throughout the book is likely to scare the frivolous at first; but the earnest will no doubt find it rewarding to master the system and use it.

(L.F.)

NOTES AND COMMENTS

The International Union for Conservation of Nature meeting at Delhi in November

The Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India, has invited a number of eminent naturalists of the International Union for Conservation of Nature to a seminar in New Delhi in the third week of this month. Various matters of importance connected with Wild Life Preservation and Nature Conservation in this country will be discussed, and it is hoped that this will be an important landmark in our attempt to save our vanishing wild life and protect suitable habitats from being overrun by thoughtless development.

The Newsletter hopes to report on the results of the meeting in the next issue.

CORRESPONDENCE

Roosting habits of the Coppersmith

Coppersmiths roost in holes, but it is not uncommon for them to roost like other birds on perches under a canopy of leaves. Last summer I saw a single bird roosting on a banyan twig for days together. In the same tree there were some more though I could not actually see them.

We are told that coppersmiths make a nest to rear their young ones and afterwards use it as a roost. Contrary to this arrangement on 10.vii.1965, I saw a lone bird poking out a hole in a log of wood fixed obliquely on the top of one of the several pikes that fence a yard. During the following days it completed the work and used it as a roost. Whether the same hole will be used by the same bird as a nest in the next nest-ing season is to be observed.

T.V. Jose

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Nest of the Tailor Bird

My father had written an account of a Topsy Turvy Nest in the Newsletter of February 1964. The nest was first seen by us in October 1963. Again a tailor bird built a nest in October 1964 but did not finish it. It remained like a hollow pipe in the almond tree.

Again this October the tailor bird has built a nest in the same almond tree. It was Topsy Turvy to start with and now the leaf has become straight. I wonder whether the bird will lay any eggs in it. The nest is 19 ft. from the ground. I measured it with a bamboo pole and then measured the pole with a tape.

There are two other tailor bird's nests in the compound which are only 5 ft. away from the ground.

Sumedha Nilakanta

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Birdwatching in British Columbia, Canada and elsewhere

I have had a most interesting and indeed wonderful summer vacation, having spent most of my time in the British Columbia coast of Canada learning about the bird life over there. On my way back to Pakistan and before the fighting erupted, I spent a few days in the New Hebrides and Solomon Islands and a whole month in Australia. I had the thrill of seeing the famous Lyre bird singing and displaying as well as wild emus, large flocks of various species of cockatoos, etc. In the Solomon Islands on a remote volcanic island I had the wonderful experience of seeing a huge hatchery of Incubator Birds (Megapodes) which laid their eggs in warm volcanic ash instead of a mound of rotting vegetation, and whose eggs were regularly dug out and 'farmed' by the nearby native villages.

Tom J. Roberts

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Birdwatching in Nagaland

Nagaland is a marvellous country. Totally mountainous, with highest range, Patkoi, rising 12,000 ft. The valleys and the steeper nallahs are a mass of vegetation. Trees soar skyward, like giant pillars, holding a canopy through which the sunlight barely penetrates. Exotic climbers and orchids claw the trees in a deadly embrace. It is a sight which completely overawes a beholder. The gentler slopes and the mountain tops are shaved off of the trees as the Nagas believe in the primitive method of shifting cultivation. But here and there the fallow hillsides are covered with luxuriant high grass, ferns and shrubbery that would put to shame any garden tendered by human hand. What I am trying to get at is that bird life is rich in variety.

For the present the swifts are a constant source of wonder to me with their speed and grace of flight. Perched

on this mountain top of ca. 5000 ft. I can observe the larger swifts of our sub-continent, hurtling down in the valleys and the slopes. It is fascinating watching them through the binoculars. You get a bird in the view, it twists and turns, scratches itself, ruffles its feathers to clear itself of the little raindrops, makes a gentle straight descent in the valley at a breath-taking speed, in the background the mountain slope is rushing by. Soon you feel that it has gone far for minute observation and as you take down the binoculars and see with the naked eye, you see a small dot dashing across the mountain slope thousands of feet below. Here there are mixed bands of the Whitethroated and Brownthroated Spinetail Swifts.

Pratap Singh, I.P.S.
Dy. Commandant, 4th M.P.P.
Titabar, Sibsagar Dist.
Assam

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Spotted Owlets.

Last term an orderly brought a couple of Spotted Owlets to a friend's cabin -- I don't know how he caught them. This friend sent for me.

We kept the owlets for a few days feeding them with cooked meat smuggled from the mess. We washed the meat thoroughly to rid it of oil and spices before feeding it to the birds. All this had to be done surreptitiously because we are not allowed to keep pets.

The owlets used to perch on our hands but if we bobbed them up and down they seemed to become excited for they would then screech horribly. We had to let them go after a few days.

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NEWSLETTER

FOR BIRDPWATCHERS

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CONTENTS

Round and about Rajkot. By K.S. Lavkumar	1
Placing the Family. By Jamal Ara	4
Three days Birdwatching at Karjat. By Rev. A. Navarro, S.J.	6
The Whitespotted Fantail Flycatcher. By Zafar Futehally ..	7
Notes and Comments	8
Correspondence	
A winter visitor at Colaba, Bombay. By T.V. Jose (p. 9);	
Alleged incompetency by the Lesser Hill Myna (<u>Gracula religiosa indica</u>) in talking. By P.W. Soman (p. 9)	

ROUND AND ABOUT RAJKOT

By

K. S. Lavkumar

Rajkot has been expanding its urbane tentacles rapidly in all directions at a phenomenal rate and it is becoming more and more difficult for birdwatchers to get out of built-up areas into open country. However it is still possible to easily be among typically Saurashtrian farmland within a brisk ten minutes' walk from the Rajkumar College if one goes to the south-west through the campus of the local Arts and Science Colleges, and across the railway line. Here, within an hour, one can list a variety of common resident and at this time of the year, passage migrants as well as winter residents. It is a fine area to start the hobby of birdwatching with a 'Salim Ali' in hand.

During the Divali holidays, a group of us made it a habit to visit this locality every morning, leaving my residence at 7.30 a.m. after a warming cup of coffee to which of late I have become addicted. Occasionally the outings ended over a table bearing dosas and good south Indian coffee at a ramshakled Madras cafe. These mornings were indeed most invigorating and their value in improving the metabolism for the rest of the day has to be experienced to be truly appreciated.

The first bird to be seen would be an ubiquitous Ring Dove, and possibly, a Baybacked Shrike might force itself on the casual passer-by's attention by its harsh grating calls and beaconic white breast atop an Euphorbia stem. These shrikes are particularly common along hedgegrows at this time of the year and remain so throughout the cool months. They unfortunately do not seem to like the Saurashtrian air for breeding, though they are common resident birds over the rest of the country and I saw many young birds, obviously recently out of their nests in May, when I visited the Flamingo City in the Rann of Kutch.

There has been an inordinate amount of mist in the early mornings and quite often it was only after 8.00 a.m. that the miasmas were raised by the warming rays of the sun and the birds started their quest for food. A quiet appraisal of the thorn bushes edging irrigated pieces of farmland would soon reveal a surprising variety of feathered creatures. Green Bee-eaters would glint on bronzed wings snapping up the first winged insects arising into the sun, while rows of cuddly confiding Whitethroated Munias would suddenly flutter in twittering flocks from barbed wires to settle on tall stems of seeding grasses; when gleaning these, they are quite oblivious of close scrutiny. I consider them one of the most charming of birds in our areas.

A typical chak-r-r-r-r would attract attention to the pied person of the yellow- or brown-fronted woodpecker as he would fly low and undulating to a babool their favourite tree. The loose, peeling and half rotten bark of these trees harbour an inordinate number of insects which provide this useful bird with rich fare. Unfortunately, the depredation on trees has begun to tell and numbers of babools have been greatly decreased over the countryside to the detriment of birdlife in general. This woodpecker which is so partial to groves of Acacia has become quite infrequent and to see a bird regularly may be counted as luck indeed. Another bird which also appears to be linked with the babool is the pretty Red Turtle Dove. A few pairs of these attractive doves occupy our area. They are nowhere as common as might be expected. Their association is on account of the thorny tangles among which they construct their flimsy nests. Babools are indeed the favourite sites for building for all three of the doves occurring here, the Ring Dove, the Little Brown Dove, and the Red Turtle Dove. The Little Brown Dove, also builds low down close to the ground in Euphorbia clumps. Ring Doves have a very extended breeding period and a bird was contentedly sitting on her eggs in a date palm frond. I often wonder how these platforms of twigs manage to survive the onslaughts of our customary gale force winds. That they are efficient is doubtless, as both the Ring Doves and the Little Brown Doves are among our commonest birds and their characteristic cooing calls are a backdrop to any rural afternoon. Wrynecks are commoner than would be apparent, but their quiet demeanour and concealing colourings make them easy to overlook. It is by their distinctive colour pattern of black, brown and fulvous that they are unmistakable when once seen. A Wryneck frequented our hedgogrows and we were able to watch it on more than one occasion. The bird feeds quite frequently on the ground and in fact, on more occasions I have seen it on the ground than up in a tree where all self respecting woodpeckers might be expected to remain; but then the wryneck is most singular among woodpeckers. It arrives in October and stays the winter with us. Wrynecks are very partial to ants and as this food source is not likely to get scarce under any conditions, we can be assured of their continued plentitude. Another bird which is so integral a part of our countryside both by sight and sound is the avian rowdy, the Large Grey Babbler. These babblers are very useful indeed as insect destroyers, though they will eat anything should need arise. Their large untidy nests of sticks are prominent structures inside isolated acacias. The qualities of the 'Large Greys' are most commendable; they will feed each others young, and will band together in furious onslaught if any predator presumes aggression on any of their troupe.

October is a very interesting month in Saurashtra and our farm complex was no exception, and all the passage migrants one might hope to see in this part of the country are here. Spotted Flycatchers, are frequent, but their inconspicuous colourings make them 'rare', Pale Brown Shrikes are commoner than at other times of the winter, while for a period, Kashmir Rollers are more num-

erous than the Indian Roller which is a beautiful and typical bird of cultivation. It is always good to see two species closely related side by side as then the comparisons are easy, and many of our novice members had a fine opportunity of getting to know the two Rollers. The same is true of the cock Pied Bush Chats and the Pied Wheatears, both of which are frequent and we were also able to compare the hens of the Pied Bush Chat with the mate of the Collared Bush Chat, though the cock himself has as yet evaded us. Common House Sparrows hang around in gossiping flocks around the farm houses and with them invariably are a couple of Yellowthroated Sparrows, the yellow throat never conspicuous at this time of the year, but when seen side by side the two sparrows are easily told apart.

Warblers will always remain enigmas to most casual birdwatchers and for simplicity and to prevent confusion we have grouped all our birds into longtailed warblers, of which the Tailor is type example, and the winter warblers. This simplification seems to make things easy for all, and from this we shall later get one step forward in isolating the Whitethroats, the phylloscopii, and the acrocephalii and Hippolais. The resident warblers can be attacked at leisure when the winter complex has been reduced. All these warblers are to be seen on any walk.

Larks have to be compared with the similar pipits and later the finch larks recognized from the rest. The larks with us at the moment are the Ashycrowned Finch Larks, a nest with four eggs of which was found in late October and close to a frequented road, Rufoustailed Finch Larks whose rambling ditties on the wing are admired by all, the Tawny Pipits, the flocks of Short-toed Larks, and couples of Sykes's Crested Larks.

All irrigated plots are unfailing attraction to wagtails of the White and Yellow groups. At the moment they are not at their best, however the fact that they allow a close observation, it is become easy to unravel their forms. It is best they are seen first in nondescript plumage as then the full beauty of their spring garb will provide a thrilling recognition. Nothing can be more holding than a sight of a plot full of yellow wagtails in their breeding plumes.

Among the birds of prey, the constant companions are a couple of White-eyed Buzzards, a loud-voiced shikra, and a female kestrel, conspicuous by her hovering in the air. The last time we were out, we witnessed a combined attack by a pair of Red-headed Merlin on a lucky hoopoe, or rather an intrepid hoopoe who on inadequate wings out rose the 'Sabre Jets' and then hastily took refuge among stacks of cut millet. The speed and viciousness of each stoop the little falcon was breath-taking to behold. More leisurely was the gliding flight of Pale Harriers both males and females. Their method of suddenly diving round bushes and stacks is most revealing.

These morning outings have been most enjoyable and it is indeed lucky that we have such a fine area so close to our homes. The farmers seem to be vehement about not parting with their lands even though the inducements to sell are high and till they can hold out against temptations, we are assured of a morning's birdwatching whenever we feel like a short morning walk.

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PLACING THE FAMILY

By

Jamal Ara

Even lay people can distinguish birds in seven broad classifications: for example the perching birds cannot be confused with the vultures and eagles which are birds of prey. The other five categories are of waders, swimmers, ground birds, sea-birds, and pigeons.

This broad classification has been made more particular by placing birds in 15 orders. If one gives thought to this classification by remembering the look of typical birds of each order, placing any new birds in its proper order is easy. Smaller than the orders are the families, constituted by a number of closely related genera. One genus includes some very close-related species. The actual identity of a bird is in its species.

1. PASSERES: Perching birds. This order includes 33 families, and is a huge group of the most recent birds in the history of the world. The common ones are crows, tree-pies, babblers, bulbuls, robins, flycatchers, drongos, mynas, bayas, sparrows, munias, swallows, wagtails, and sunbirds. This is by far the largest group of birds; they are usually of small size, the crows being the largest. The birds agree in having helpless young, naked or nearly so, and a very characteristic foot, with three toes before and one behind, the latter with its claw being usually larger than any of the front ones, making them primarily fitted for flight and perching. The habits of the passerine birds vary greatly, some being insectivorous and some vegetarian, but the majority are mixed feeders. Most frequent bushes and trees, some live on the ground and some on the wing. The nest similarly varies in position and construction, being on trees or bushes, in holes or on the ground; it is generally well made; and amongst the Passerines the best examples of bird architecture are to be found as the nests of the baya. The eggs are usually coloured or spotted, but may be plain or even pure white. In passing, it is best to remember that Passeres is simply the plural of Passer, the sparrow, and that universally known follows is what the average Passeres should be.

2. CORACIIFORMES. This order contains 16 families, the birds included being woodpeckers, barbets, cuckoos, parrots, rollers, bee-eaters, kingfishers, hornbills, hoopoes, swifts, nightjars, and owls. In this order the toes may either be arranged in pairs, or be like the previous order but so joined as to act almost like one, or all directed forward and weak. Most of them have powerful bills, for chiselling in wood or boring in the ground or for tearing their food. They are mostly medium sized birds, the largest being the hornbills. Most of them are carnivorous and some vegetarian. They inhabit trees but some live on the ground or on the wing. The nest may be holes in trees, natural or excavated; tunnels in the ground, or cemented structures attached to rocks or buildings. The eggs are generally white or mottled. The young are born naked except for the nightjars. The owls and nightjars are nocturnal. The cuckoos are parasitic.

3. ACCIPITRES: Diurnal birds of prey. This order contains three families, the birds included being ospreys, vultures, falcons, and eagles. They have powerful hooked bills, and the two outer toes at least are connected by a web. They are usually of large or at least moderate size, never displaying brilliant colours. The sexes are alike, and the young are covered

with down. The nest is built on the ground, on trees or on rocks. The eggs are white and never more than two. The nest is a scanty structure of sticks and twigs placed in a tree or a bush. They are vegetarians and often destructive.

5. PTEROCLATES. This order contains one family, the birds included being sand grouses. They have feathered legs and toes, often with spurs on the shanks, which are used for fighting. The sexes are often dissimilar, and then the bird is polygamous. The toes are adapted for walking, the bills are small and feeble the wings are long and the flight is powerful.

6. GALLINAE : Game birds. This order contains two families, the birds included being peafowls, pheasants, junglefowl, and quails. They are easily known by their small heads, with short curved beaks, heavy bodies, short rounded wings, and powerful feet, with three toes before and one behind, the front toes being webbed at the base, and the whole foot coarsely scaled. They are omnivorous, though partially vegetarian. The flight is heavy and they seldom fly far. They spend most of their time on the ground, scratching amongst earth and leaves for food. The nest is very rough, and the numerous eggs are either plain or spotted. Tail-less to very big tails.

7. HEMIPODII : Land birds which run well but fly poorly. This order contains one family, the birds included being bustard-quails. They are richly coloured birds, the female is larger and polyandrous. The male incubates and rears the young.

8. GRALLAE : Water birds and waders. This order contains 6 families, the birds included being water rails, crakes, jacanas, snipes, cranes, and bustards. The legs are long and part of the tibia is bare, the hind toe when present being bare. They are marsh birds in general living amongst reeds and grass. The food is chiefly vegetable. The eggs are double-spotted. The young in most are hatched covered with down and are able to run almost immediately.

9. CHARADRIIFORMES : Waders and sea-birds. This order contains 9 families, the birds included being plovers, curlews, coursers, gulls, terns, skimmers, and turnstones. The bill varies greatly but is usually slender and often long. The leg up to the first joint is usually bare. The wings are as a rule long, the birds being strong fliers. They are found in pools, stream-beds, rice fields, and marshes. They feed on small insects, crustacea, and sometimes vegetable matter. Most of them are migratory.

10. STEGANOPODES : Mostly sea-birds. This order contains five families, the birds included are pelicans, cormorants, gannets, and others. Large birds which are at once distinguished by having all the four toes webbed together, though the first is directed backwards or sideways and is of use in perching, in the ordinary way. The legs are always short, but the general form and that of the bill varies greatly. They live by fishing, pursuing their prey, however, in different ways; they usually build nests for the reception of their young, which are helpless nestlings, naked at first, but acquiring down before their regular feathers. The eggs are few and usually spotted and covered with a chalky coating. The birds fly well and perch on trees more than other waterfowl.

11. TUBINARES : (sea birds). This order contains one family, that of petrels.

12. HERODIONES : Waders, with long bills, necks and legs. This

order contains 4 families, the birds included are ibises, spoon-bills, storks, herons, and bitterns. They have long legs, are of slight build with powerful beaks and well-developed hind toes. They perch a great deal and usually build nests in communities on trees, the eggs being few and usually spotless, and the young helpless though downy. They are numerous in hot climates; are carnivorous, specially devouring fish and are themselves seldom used as food. They are less active on their feet than the other waders, though excellent fliers, flying with their legs extended backwards.

13. PHOENICOPTERI : Waders with excessively long legs and necks. This order contains one family, that of flamingoes. They are white birds with long pink beaks.

14. ANSERES : Swimmers. This order contains only one family, that of swans, ducks, teals, and geese. The three anterior toes are united by webs, extending to the ends of the digits. The bill is more or less depressed or flattened. They spend most of their time on water. All the species are monogamous, and the majority build nests of grass and rushes on the ground; the eggs are numerous, white buff and cream in colour. The young are hatched covered with down and are able to run or swim at once.

15. PGOPEDES : Divers. This order contains two families, the birds included being grebes and divers. They are tail-less brown birds, spending most of their time on water, diving for food. They build floating nests amongst reeds and rushes on water.

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THREE DAYS BIRDWATCHING AT KARJAT

By

A. Navarro, S.J.

Having three consecutive holidays from the 28th to the 30th of August, with a small group of students we decided to go to Karjat (Western Ghats, Maharashtra) for birdwatching. The first day it rained almost the whole day long, but the second and third day the weather proved to be more in our favour; with good weather we could move more freely with better chances to collect more accurate observations.

In fact no birds could be seen except the most common resident birds of that locality, with the exception of Blossomheaded Parakeets that could be seen in great numbers all over that area; most of the time they were flying in small groups.

The most interesting event of the three days' birdwatching was that from the first day we noticed an incoming stream of Wimbrel flying rather high above us. They were flying in groups; the larger groups must have been about 12 to 14 birds and the smaller group about three to four. All groups were coming from the same direction and all followed the same route forwards.

The route followed by the wimbrels, as far as we could observe, was that, they were flying midway between Bhiupuri Power House and Bhiupuri Station, passing over Karjat and taking the direction of Alibaug or Rivadanda Creek, avoiding the hills and flying always over the plains. When the sky was clouded, the wimbrels were flying higher; in a clear sky the birds used to fly so low as that they could be identified by eye-sight.

In the morning, the wimbrels could be seen cruising the sky up to one in the afternoon; in the evenings around five they were seen again until it was rather dark, almost up to 6.30, giving the impression that from one to five the birds must have been resting or feeding somewhere. During the three days observations we could not see a single wimbrel flying in the opposite direction.

We saw plenty of Whitebreasted Waterhens and Common Rails with a few Chestnut Bitterns. On a large tank by the roadside we found four pairs of Dabchicks breeding. Nevertheless we wondered why we could not see a single Bronzewing Jacana. Still our surprise was greater when we discovered that a large lake belonging to the Central Railway situated about a mile from Karjat was completely devoid of bird life, when in previous years about the same time there were small colonies of cormorants and egrets breeding on the half submerged trees around the lake.

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THE WHITESPOTTED FANTAIL FLYCATCHER

By

Zafar Futehally

In the middle of July this year a pair of Whitespotted Fantail Flycatchers (Rhipidura albogularis) became very active in our garden. Throughout the day they sang and whistled happily and moved about through the foliage of trees with the agility and grace which only they are capable of. They spent the day weaving in and out of the branches of a chiku, mango, drumstick, and Ficus glomerata tree in a corner of our garden.

I was sure that the birds were nesting and in a couple of days I traced the nest on the lower branch of a chiku tree just 6 ft. from the ground. I could get an excellent view of the bird on the nest through the grill of our godown, from a distance of only four feet.

At this stage, the most exciting event was to see the birds fight away the crows that came in the neighbourhood of the nest. Once an attack was launched even on a crow-pheasant and it was lucky that this predator which came within ten feet of the nest did not see it. The agitation of the flycatchers was pathetic, but their dauntlessness in dealing with the destructive crow-pheasant was quite inspiring.

As frequently happens after a night of heavy rain, the nest loosened on its moorings and fell to the ground. The birds however did not waste any time bemoaning their loss. A second nest came up quickly on an Ixora shrub within 20 ft. of the original site. 3 eggs were laid and incubation went on merrily by turns. One day a lizard came dangerously close to the nest but was chased away by the parent birds.

I had a look at the nest every morning before going to office and one day while driving out of the gate I saw one of the flycatchers at the nest besides itself with joy. It was bending into the nest from time to time, and I thought perhaps one of the eggs had hatched. My assumption was correct and the adult bird was actually fussing over its new born babe. In course of time 3 chicks were born but one died during the first few days. This was towards the end of August. When the chicks were almost old

enough to fly away, the second nest too broke down, and had it not been for the fact that we were around at the time and placed the nest back in position with sticking plaster the young would have surely died. I forgot to mention that we had put up a wire-netting enclosure round the nest to protect it from crows and other unprincipled aggressors.

The two adult and the two young birds now fully grown up are still seen together. Their presence makes our garden a very joyous place indeed.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

International Union for Conservation of Nature Seminar

An important seminar on Wild Life Preservation and Nature Conservation was organized by the Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India, in New Delhi on the 24th of November. Many well-known naturalists including Prof. Francois Bourliere, Sir Hugh Elliot, Mr. Peter Scott, Dr. Lee Talbot, Mr. Fraser Darling, and others equally eminent participated. The Indian delegation consisted of officials of the Ministry of Food, members of the Standing Committee of the Indian Board for Wild Life, and several eminent naturalists and wild life enthusiasts.

The meeting was primarily called to consider various problems connected with Wild Life Preservation in this country.

Dr. Salim Ali read a short paper on birds and agriculture. He drew attention to the fact that birds are considered by the thoughtless to be the enemies of the farmer because they eat the grain which he grows with such labour. But he pointed out that in fact the birds devour a large number of injurious insects which if allowed to multiply would do far more damage to crops than birds are capable of. He pleaded for ecological studies of birds to enable a proper assessment of their role in the scheme of things.

Prof. Francois Bourliere spoke on the scientific aspects of Wild Life Conservation and drew attention to the importance of maintaining type habitats which were disappearing from the world. With the disappearance of habitats particular forms of life also get extinct.

Mr. Peter Scott spoke on the aesthetic and cultural side of wild life and also harped on the ethical question of the justification of human being destroying other species.

Mr. Fraser Darling spoke of the importance of the right type of education at all levels.

Mr. B.V. Ramanjalu referred to the importance of creating bird breeding farms in this country for re-stocking diminishing species.

Mr. S.K. Kooka spoke about the importance of preserving of Wild Life from the point of view of tourist revenues.

Mr. E.P. Gee made several valuable comments for the preservation of species endangered by disappearing habitats and through other causes.

Mr. Zafar Futehally spoke about the role of voluntary bod-

ics in arousing interest in Wild Life and pleaded that a publication fund should be established in India so that private societies could draw on it and publish books on nature which they were unable to do because of lack of funds. He referred to the fact that the Bombay Natural History Society in the past had to depend on the generosity of the late Loke Wan Tho for bringing out such important books like THE BOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS by Salim Ali.

The meeting was presided over by Mr. Shah Nawaz Khan, Deputy Minister for Agriculture, who in his introductory speech referred to the existing situation in the country. It is hoped that the valuable comments made by the distinguished visitors from abroad will help the Government of India in taking more effective measures for Wild Life Preservation and Nature Conservation in this country.

The day following the Seminar the visiting team went to the Waterbird Sanctuary of Keoladeo Ghana, Bharatpur, and their considered comment was that this is one of the finest bird sanctuaries in the world. One of the members of the team listed a 127 species during the day.

CORRESPONDENCE

A winter visitor at Colaba, Bombay

On 14 November 1965, early in the morning, while watching the activities of birds, I came upon one Paradise Flycatcher (Tchitreca paradisi) that was perching on a lower branch of a pongom tree. Perhaps, it was a female bird, for it had no long trailing tail feathers. Also I observed that it was silent, but making occasional dashes into the air. My attempts to trace the bird on the following days ended only in failure.

In my 12 years' stay here this is the first time I saw a Paradise Flycatcher.

T.V. Jose

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Alleged incompetency by the Lesser Hill Myna (Gracula religiosa indica) in talking

With reference to the article about the alleged incompetency by the Lesser Hill Myna (Gracula religiosa indica) in talking in some of the 1964 issues of the Newsletter I have to remark as follows.

I have a captive myna with me since 1962. I brought it while it was about two to 2½ months old. It originally came from Orissa. This bird had a companion from the same area, of about the same age and the two were together since I got them both in 1962. Since July 1962, I had both these birds with me and my brother trained them to say many things like 'Good Morning' and both the birds talked well.

Last November (1964) one bird died suddenly and I have only one bird left since then. In the first two days the surviving myna appeared a little nervous, but was feeding normally, but had left talking and chattering. It resumed it again after about a week and was normal again.

In 1965 March, I got one Green Pigeon from Kerala and I had left that bird also in the same cage. In the beginning these birds fought a little but after some time they were friends. This green pigeon did not feed in the presence of any person in the beginning, but after some time it started feeding even in the presence of people and slowly started its typical whistling call. This call has been picked up by the myna now and it is repeated by it very often.

re-/ From this experience of the myna I feel that even an adult myna could pick up human words and repeat them and the common allegation made against the adult hill mynas is not correct. My four year old bird has picked up quite a few words very recently, after it was three years old.

P.W. Soman

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